

JOHN THADEUS DELANE

From the Painting by H. A. G. Schmitt, in the National Portrait Gallery

THE PUBLIC LIFE

By
J. A. SPENDER

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With Four Half-tone Plates



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BOOK V
DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNMENT

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CHAPTER XVIII

SOME PROBLEMS OF PARLIAMENT

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I

ONE day in the summer of 1920 three very agreeable and intelligent Chinamen came into my room at the *Westminster Gazette* office and flattered me by saying that they wished to take my advice about the state of public affairs in China, and the peculiar and unexpected *impasse* into which they had fallen. The situation, as they explained it, was that a Parliament had been set up in Peking, but that the results so far were extremely discouraging. Its members were very dutiful in their attendance; they sat and they sat, they talked and they talked—but nothing happened. They had been told, they said, that only an Englishman knew how to make things happen in a Parliament; and, coming to the point, they asked me whether I would approach Mr. Asquith, whom they understood to be at that moment disengaged, and suggest to him

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that he should go to Peking and spend a certain number of months there in showing Chinese legislators how to get things done.

For sundry reasons that project fell through, but the Chinamen's description of their parliamentary experiment remained in my mind as a sudden and vivid light thrown over the whole parliamentary scene. Why should the art of talk be linked to the art of government, why should anything happen because six hundred gentlemen assemble together and talk furiously about the state of the nation? The question conjures up a vision of the centuries of struggle and striving in which monarchs, ministers, soldiers and officials have been painfully subdued to the necessity of surrendering power to the talking six hundred; of the slow growth of custom and usage which in a very few countries has brought the Executive under the control of the Parliament. Englishmen have been so accustomed to take Parliament for granted that they are apt to forget in how many countries it is still but a frail structure of recent creation and limited capacity, an object of suspicion, if not of contempt, to honest citizens. Only in this country has it any deep roots or long history which could justify a philosophic observer from another planet in thinking it to be a permanent human institution.

The complete Sovereign Parliament with an Executive responsible to it on the British model is not even a necessary accompaniment of democratic institutions. I have quoted elsewhere the warning of the "Federalist" to the American people that they "ought to indulge all their jealousy and exhaust all their precautions against the enterprising ambition of the Legislative Department of Government." The Constitution of the United States bristles with provisions to prevent Congress from usurping the power which it deliberately gives to the Executive, and sets the Supreme Court above both. A President may without any impropriety fight both House and Senate and, though opinion may judge him wrong, he is not supposed to have exceeded his prerogatives in challenging their authority. It cannot be said at this moment that the confidence in

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parliamentary institutions with which nineteenth century England infected the rest of the world is maintained at the old high level. The Mother of Parliaments herself is seen staggering under blows which the war first and the social upheaval afterwards have delivered at her orderly system of parties and other consecrated traditions ; there are Cromwells or pseudo-Cromwells at large in Latin countries, " taking away the baubles " ; the new-comers into parliamentarism have scarcely found their feet, and are fortunate if they can discover men with enough capacity and experience to make things happen as the result of talk.

Yet parliamentary government is in one sense justified. It has survived the great storm in which the despotisms foundered, and whatever may be the maladies from which it suffers, it is impossible to say that autocracy is the preferable alternative. We have the testimony of Germans who lived under the most efficient bureaucracy that the world has yet seen, that they lacked in the supreme trial the rallying power possessed by the democratic peoples. Despots or brilliant adventurers may again have their hour, but there is no warrant for the belief that any form of autocracy will serve a modern nation as its normal form of government.

So men of democratic opinions may face the facts about parliamentary institutions without being suspected of a desire to discredit them. In some way or other they must be made to work, and respect for them be maintained. In previous chapters I have endeavoured to look at the various types of Parliament and to ascertain what has happened or is happening to them. There is the limited type cut off from the Executive, left to make what it can of the business of legislation without official guidance, and controlling the Executive only by the power of the purse. This has generally been the resort of Federal states, Germany before the War, America from the beginning till now ; and it reflects the jealousies which the separate states entertain of the central power. Then there is the Sovereign type, of which our own is the model, and the French the closest

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example, in which the Executive is responsible to Parliament, and Ministers come and go according as they gain or lose its confidence. The second type has been adopted in the British Commonwealth and in the new autonomous countries and naturally so, for the limited Parliaments can never gain the prestige which belongs, or ought to belong, to the Sovereign Parliaments. Membership of them is not an object of high ambition to public men, and may even be a bar to the highest success. The Executive overrides or circumvents them in visible and even cynical ways which destroy their authority. Their legislative power is largely nullified because the Executive, not having initiated their measures, will not be responsible for administering them. On the other hand their members, having no responsibility for administration, fall into the habit of piling up Bills which are not intended to become law or to serve any purpose but that of making political capital. Most of these projects are stifled in the committees or commissions through which an assembly of this type usually works, and a considerable portion of the remainder are vetoed, and intended to be vetoed, by the superior powers, President, Federal Council or what not, appointed for the purpose. Such a method of legislation can only work if the power of veto is real and effective.

The chief power which these Assemblies exercise is through the control of the purse, but this is not in practice very effective. It is in fact too formidable a weapon for ordinary purposes, and the Assemblies are generally too uncertain of their standing with the electors to make effective use of it. What usually happens is that the two authorities make a show of bargaining with each other, which means generally that the Government puts certain items into its Budget for the purpose of letting the Assembly take them out, and honour is supposed to be satisfied on both sides when they are withdrawn. Tirpitz, for example, generally loaded his estimates with cruisers or destroyers which could be given away to a complaining Reichstag without the sacrifice of anything that he thought important. But the Reichstag was always aware that, if any serious issue arose, the

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power of dissolution gave the Executive the whip-hand. The "shock tactics," by which Bismarck threatened to dissolve and dissolve again until he got a Reichstag to do his will, struck a cold chill into the hearts of his opponents ; and the ex-Kaiser threatening to grind to powder those who obstructed him was equally a figure of terror to elected persons.

The ascendancy of an elected person on the American model may have a future in democratic states, but it seems to me improbable that the limited Assembly will be a model for new experiments. Those who want dictatorships, whether of the proletariat or of monarchs, may occasionally try a dose of them, but in unified and homogeneous countries at all events those who want self-government will rely on the Sovereign Parliament.

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But this also is exposed to a lively criticism which it is necessary to consider. Undoubtedly the belief is widespread in Europe to-day that the Sovereign Parliaments are not, as they profess to be, representative and independent organs of public opinion, but the creatures and play-things of ambitious or designing men, who "make elections" and manipulate parties, so as to thwart the popular intention. When in one country Parliament is seen to be at the mercy of groups of politicians who take turns in office by arrangement with each other, and in another parties have so little significance that it matters nothing to anybody which of them wins an election, and in a third corruption is so deep-seated that votes are openly for sale, parliamentary institutions are supposed to have been tried and found wanting. Somewhat unfairly, for there is no magic in these institutions which will raise them above the current faults and frailties of the countries which adopt them, or make them superior to human nature in general. But they are undoubtedly liable to certain collective infirmities which set in very rapidly when the leaders of opinion abdicate their proper authority or exploit the meaner tendencies of their fellow-countrymen. It is displeasing to

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hear Mussolini inveighing against parliamentary institutions, but no one can believe it possible that Fascism would have triumphed if the Italian Parliament to which he applied his purge had not to a very large extent deserved its fate. All systems are ultimately judged by results, and a parliamentary system under which public affairs are grossly mismanaged, or tyranny grows up, or corruption becomes scandalous, will not escape the reckoning which the free peoples have always exacted from the powers that misgovern them.

It is not enough that institutions should be free ; there must also be the will to work them freely. The innumerable ways which skilful politicians have invented for capturing the democracy, compelling it to go their way, preventing it from going any other way ; the machines, the caucuses, the coupons, the bargainings, the log-rolling, lead a large number of people in all countries to suspect that the last thing politicians desire is a free expression of opinion. In a great many countries the question is not whether democracy has failed but whether self-styled democratic politicians will ever let it be tried. Politicians may often be credited with a sincere belief that their own ascendancy or that of their party is a patriotic necessity and, so far as this gives warmth and sincerity to political struggles, it is by no means to be discouraged. But from this belief to the conclusion that all means are justified which help them to power or keep them in power is but a short step, and so soon as it is taken, the cause of Parliament is in danger. It is the first assumption of democratic politics that parliamentarians will shape issues fairly and abide by the popular verdict. The political strategy which aims at outmanœuvring opponents or outwitting electors is an axe at the root of the tree.

Honesty of intention being assumed, what are the conditions of success in parliamentary government ? The first is that the Parliament shall be elected under a franchise

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and electoral system which make it sufficiently representative of the opinion of the country ; and the next is that while it controls the Executive it shall not destroy its initiative or impair its authority in the things that are essential to orderly government. Controversy, that is to say, must be kept within the bounds of acknowledged national interests. Further—and this is more subtle—the control of the Parliament by the Government is the corollary of the control of the Government by the Parliament. The House of Commons is always master, but it can only exercise its mastery on the condition that on all ordinary occasions it consents to be led. It may rebel against its leaders and depose them ; but unless it consents to be led while they remain leaders, it becomes a mob with the weakness and incoherence of a mob. Thus the natural organization of Parliament is that of a prevailing will and a resisting will both under discipline and both acknowledging a common interest which is superior to their controversies. The prevailing will must not be arbitrary and resistance to it must not be defiance. To keep the two things in an even balance is nine-tenths of the art of parliamentary government, and at the back of it must be a tacit understanding between parties so to act as, in the familiar phrase, to enable the King's Government to be carried on. Thus only can the Sovereign Parliament perform its functions, without bringing the Executive to a standstill or destroying its own power of orderly legislation.

There is no better example of this parliamentary art than the handling of finance by the British House of Commons. The power of the purse is undoubtedly the sheet-anchor of the free Parliament, and the House of Commons is always aware that this weapon is in its hands. But it has deliberately deprived its unofficial members of the right of proposing additions to taxation, while at the same time jealously guarding the principle that ways and means shall be debated in Committee of the whole House and that a Government shall stand or fall by its Budget. The House may criticize the Budget, but it requires that the Government alone shall be responsible for balancing the national

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accounts. No part of British practice has been better justified by the results.

Where, as in the United States or in France, the financial proposals of the Government are liable to be revised by Budget Commissions or Committees, before which the Government is only a witness, and Budgets may be returned to Governments in forms which they scarcely recognize, the responsibility for balancing the national accounts becomes dangerously attenuated. The Government blames its critics, its critics blame the Government, and deficits left by disallowed taxes or new schemes of expenditure are made up by borrowings which everybody professes to deplore.

All British Governments are aware of the light-heartedness with which Members of Parliament will vote for proposals which must increase expenditure and then turn about and charge the Government with extravagance, when it concedes their demands. But, though year by year the Chancellor of the Exchequer considers himself the most aggrieved of men, he is there to be shot at in precisely this way. Parliament must be free to pursue the ideal regardless of ways and means; the Government must be responsible for deciding what the taxpayer can bear. If the Government gets into trouble for imposing in a given period heavier taxation than the taxpayer can bear, it is no answer to say that everybody approves of each separate item of expenditure, for the business of the Government and the business which the unresponsible M.P. cannot perform for himself is to decide whether the public as a whole will approve of the aggregate expenditure.

The power of the purse is *the power of refusing supplies* which (if it cannot be dodged by borrowing, carrying over and other devices practised by autocratic governments), ultimately places the Executive at the mercy of the Assembly. It is not or ought not to be the assumption by the Assembly of responsibility for conducting finance. The familiar example of shareholders and directors of a public company applies, with the necessary differences, to House and Government. The shareholders can depose the directors, or they may express views to which the directors may think

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it wise to defer, but in the latter case the directors will be held responsible for the result, whatever it may be. The concern is generally wrecked if the shareholders force upon the directors a policy of which they disapprove, and in all sound undertakings it is an acknowledged principle that, if the shareholders do this, the board resigns. When the shareholders get to the point of electing a committee to inquire into the proceedings of the directors, the City almost invariably concludes that the undertaking is on the rocks. So *mutatis mutandis* it is with Government and Parliament. Parliament may criticize and the Government may defer to its criticism, provided it will take responsibility for the result. But at the end the Budget must be the Budget of the Government, and the Government can escape none of its responsibilities by pleading the pressure of Parliament.

The acknowledged soundness of British finance, as compared with that of other countries, is due in the main to the tenacity and solemnity with which this principle has been upheld by a long line of Chancellors of the Exchequer. Many of us can remember the passionate indignation with which Mr. Gladstone repelled the slightest encroachment of the private member upon the prerogatives of the Executive in the sphere of finance. In 1886 he frightened and astonished his colleagues by a sudden and unexpected outburst at the motion of a private member declaring the increase of the Volunteer Capitation Grant to be "absolutely and urgently necessary." In a torrent of indignant oratory he swept the Volunteers from the scene and denounced the motion as a grossly unconstitutional proposal to increase the charges upon the people beyond the amount asked for by the Executive. New members were amazed and frightened at these thunders from Sinai at so seemingly innocent and popular a proposal, but the old hands judged Mr. Gladstone to have been right.

What is true of finance is true more or less of all the proceedings of the British House of Commons. Its aim

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throughout is to combine parliamentary control with Government responsibility. But this is a very delicate and partly subconscious art which may easily be marred by lack of understanding and forbearance between parties. It is upheld, or has been upheld hitherto, by a traditional feeling that the cause of Parliament is more than the cause of any Government or any party. The great British parliamentarians have been distinguished from all others by their attitude of respect and veneration for the elected Assembly which they lead. When in power they have felt themselves to be trustees of its dignity and influence ; when in opposition they have kept their warfare within the limits of argument and persuasion. What has again and again saved the House of Commons is the traditional sense of its greatness and venerability, casting a spell over its members irrespective of their political opinions. Its antiquity and the respect which it enjoys as the Mother of Parliaments give it a unique position in the world, a position which has shed a reflected glory on its members and invested the profession of politics with greater prestige in this country than in any other.

We have only to look round the world to become aware that where Parliaments are despised, politicians are held in little esteem. To maintain respect for Parliament is the law of self-preservation for the public man, and it is by no means a part of his duties which can be taken for granted or discharged by a rhetorical obeisance to its ancient glories. The proper conduct of an elected Assembly, its adaptation to new conditions, its efficiency in action, its power of holding the public attention by effective and interesting debate, are vital interests of all its members and call for an unceasing co-operative effort in its service which should never be forgotten in the service of party.

This is the more necessary since many circumstances conspire in these times to lower the esteem in which Parliament is held. For one thing it has numerous competitors for public attention. In the great variety of entertainment which they daily present to their readers, the more popular

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newspapers find little space for its proceedings. The millions who read these papers can have no consecutive idea of what it is doing ; and since only its livelier moments are at all adequately reported, they might even suppose it to be perpetually involved in discreditable scenes. Further, since the impression must be maintained that the unreported is not worth reporting, the reader is given to understand that the normal proceedings of Parliament are dull and unimportant except to the self-important people who take part in them ; and from that the transition is easy to a light-hearted contempt for the talkers and the " talking shop." All this has been poured out upon the public in recent years, regardless of the merits or interests of the debates in Parliament, and undoubtedly it has had its effect on the rising generation. It may be hoped that the Labour party will help to turn this tide and encourage workmen to an interest in Parliament which they were slow to take, so long as they supposed it to be dominated by rich and aristocratic persons.

Next, there are new dangers arising from the state of political parties. At the time at which I am writing we have had three elections in two years, and the personnel of Parliament has been very seriously affected by the strain imposed on members and candidates. This personnel tends more and more to be fined down to rich men who can afford the expenditure and subsidized men whose expenses are paid for them. Men of moderate means engaged in professions, who in ordinary circumstances would finance themselves, cannot afford the expenditure of time and money which modern electioneering demands. Equally serious is the insecurity which has hung over men of all parties. In the last three Parliaments scarcely one of the parties has been able to guarantee even its most eminent members a safe seat, or to find seats for men whom it urgently needs to do its work in Parliament, if they have been thrown out at a general election. In the 1922 Parliament Mr. Baldwin was unable to find a seat for Mr. McKenna whom he wished to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in the 1923 Parliament Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was unable to find a seat for his Solicitor-General.

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I need not speak of the plight of the Liberal party which during the same years was unable to procure the entry of Sir Donald Maclean into Parliament, and now finds itself in a position in which, though still representing more than three millions of electors, it is all but extinguished as a parliamentary force, and is unable to find seats for even its most eminent members. For the moment the Conservative party seems to be master of the situation, but another turn of the wheel may place it in the same precarious position as the other parties. Under the two-party system there was a sufficient guarantee that, however opinion might shift, the oldest and most experienced parliamentarians would continue to find seats in the House of Commons, but with three parties on the scene and few, if any, seats that can be counted safe, even ex-Prime Ministers may find themselves in the wilderness.

It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss what measures should be adopted to remedy these defects. But it may be said briefly that an electoral system which affords no guarantee that a majority of votes will be reflected in a majority of seats, and which fails to provide a reasonable security of tenure for men of proved ability and experience must eventually be ruinous to Parliament. We have a sublime confidence in muddling through with our institutions as with our wars, and the British House of Commons is surrounded with such glamour of history and antiquity that we are tempted to believe it proof against the maladies and corruptions that beset other Assemblies. That is a complacent frame of mind for which we may have yet to pay a heavy price. No one, it seems to me, can have watched recent elections with any care without becoming convinced that the loyalty to Parliament which all British parties profess requires a joint effort to place it on a basis that will ensure fairness and continuity in the working of the democratic principle.

A perfectly representative and smoothly running Parliament will still have its limitations. Government may

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for all practical purposes be "by consent," but it rests ultimately on the power of the majority to make its will prevail if challenged. In the background are police and soldiers, and sometimes we discover suddenly that there is a difference in the degree of consent which will enable them to be brought into action and that which enables the ordinary business of government to be carried on, and even unpopular measures to be enforced. In most countries the distinction is drawn in a written Constitution which requires an exceptional degree of consent to fundamental changes. Under the British system there is no such line of demarcation, and on critical occasions Parliament finds itself groping along the edge of a boundary which though unmarked is yet very real. In 1914 the Government of the day all but came up to it on the question of Ireland, and what might have happened but for the sudden substitution of another and greater struggle is still an exciting conjecture. A freely elected Parliament has the great advantage over all autocracies that dissentient minorities have as a rule only to exercise a little patience to obtain a fair chance of making their will prevail. But there are some changes, which when once made cannot be revoked, and some sentiments or prejudices, some resentments at real or supposed injustice, which cannot easily be subdued to the *fiat* of a majority.

A second chamber is generally prescribed for subjects which are in this sense dangerous, but second chambers can seldom be induced to limit their action to exceptional emergencies and more often dissipate their authority by plunging into ordinary political strife and embittering quarrels which would be far better settled without their intervention. The ideal second chamber would be one which gave the country a guarantee against the excesses of all parties, and against those of a Conservative party which went beyond its mandate, no less than against those of a Radical party proposing dangerous innovations. That probably is beyond the wit of man to devise, and in default of it, the delaying action which now remains to the House of Lords is probably the utmost power which

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a democratic electorate will ever concede to a non-elective Assembly. In fact, the House of Lords itself has generally defined its own function as that of procuring delay until the electors can be consulted, and it may be that on certain strictly defined and important subjects, the Referendum, impartially administered and thus limited, will yet have to be considered as the solution of this part of the problem. A very real objection to that and to its almost inevitable accompaniment, the initiative, is that they must tend to alter the character of Parliament and deprive it of the responsibility which is the saving virtue of representative government. For this reason it is a weapon to be held in reserve until the last necessity, but the logic of events may drive us to its adoption, if there is no necessary correspondence between the votes cast in the country and the balance of power in the House of Commons. Three-cornered electioneering undoubtedly threatens us with this danger.

But when all these questions are solved, the success of parliamentary government will still depend on obtaining a succession of men who have the parliamentary instinct, who understand the nature and limitations of the institution they are handling and will not ask of it more than it is capable of giving. It was said in the old days that the doctrine of the divine right of kings should never be forgotten by subjects or remembered by kings, and so we may say to-day of the sovereignty of Parliament. This is not and cannot be an unlimited sovereignty, however it may be described in text books. There are things which the most powerful parliamentary majority cannot do without risking disaster. The parliamentary machine may be broken equally by revolutionaries and by reactionaries. Every revolutionary who is frank tells us that if he enters Parliament it is with the ultimate object of breaking it ; every Fascist proclaims his contempt for parliamentary institutions. If public affairs became a battle between extremists of these types, Parliament would necessarily go under, for it is the instrument of those who believe in argument and reason, and are willing to submit when they are in a minority in the hope that one day they will become a

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majority. Undoubtedly there are forces and passions in human nature which are beyond its control ; supreme emergencies like war in which it must consent to its own supersession. It is beset by what Mr. Webb has called the "inevitability of gradualness." To keep political controversy within the bounds in which the parliamentary temper can prevail must therefore be the first effort of loyal parliamentarians, to whatever party they may belong.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PARTY SYSTEM

The Party System—Two Essential Functions—American Parties and their Principles—Keeping Parties Together—The Literary Judgment of Politics—Thought and Action—The Limits of Party Thinking—Theory and Practice—Contempt of Theory and Its Consequences—The Three-Party System—Prince Bülow's Opinion—The Experiment of the Labour Government—A New Technique—Confusion of Two Systems—Alliance in Parliament and War in the Country—An Impossible Combination—A Previous Experiment—Liberal Unionists and Conservatives—The Fixed Term Parliament—Its Drawbacks—A Liberal View—Parties and Electoral Machinery.

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IT is a widely spread opinion that party politics are fatal to honesty in public men. A man, it is said, must vote with his party and stifle his conscience, if it tells him that he is doing wrong. There are indeed not a few politicians who either admit this impeachment or so act as to create the impression that their choice of party and their general conduct as politicians are governed by the necessities of their own careers. Yet any general impression that the mass of politicians are cynical or consciously dishonest in their political opinions would, I believe, be profoundly untrue. The opposite charge that they are too zealous and partisan in what they believe to be the right would, on the whole, be much nearer the truth. There are, however, so many misconceptions about party politics and the ways in which they operate that a few observations on this subject may not be out of place.

The old two-party system had the great merit of dividing Parliament sharply into Government and Opposition, the Opposition performing the functions of critic and devil's advocate when not in office, and being prepared to take up the task of Government if and when its criticism prevailed.

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In some way or other, whether under a two-party system or any other, this division of functions must go on, if parliamentary government is to prosper. But to ensure that the governing party and the criticizing party shall represent distinguishable or opposing political creeds is extremely difficult and, in certain circumstances, impossible. We see the people of the United States¹ clinging tenaciously to their two parties and declaring it to be of the utmost importance that there should be no schisms in either camp. The Republican and Democratic parties do undoubtedly perform the function of criticizing each other with a vigorous impartiality which concedes little to sentiment or charity. But it becomes more and more difficult for non-Americans and perhaps even for Americans to discover in what respects they differ from each other in opinion. I read in an American newspaper in the spring of 1924 that if the Republican party ran a Conservative candidate (like Mr. Coolidge), the Democrats would do wisely to put a Progressive against him, but if on the other hand, the Republicans chose a Progressive candidate, the Democrats would do well to select a Conservative. Merely to read such a sentence is to set the brain of an English politician in a whirl. The writer apparently assumed that there was nothing to prevent the Democratic and Republican parties from being either Conservative or Progressive, as circumstances dictated. How far this is true I do not presume to say, but an Englishman who gropes for the dividing line between these parties is driven back on certain traditional but for practical purposes non-existent differences about the tariff, or certain reminiscences of the once-burning but now obsolete controversy between State rights and Federal control.

Yet both these parties inspire a fervent loyalty in their adherents and at election times their welfare excites a degree of passion and emotion which is hardly equalled in any European country. Political parties have a peculiar power of gathering men into clans long after they have ceased

¹ A third-party experiment came near success under Roosevelt in 1912, but Senator La Follette's attempt in 1924 received little encouragement.

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to express any intelligible principle, and, paradox as it may seem, this is of value to the nation. Between them the American parties are a vast freemasonry, organizing politics over immense spaces, gathering men of all races and languages into two folds, both true American folds, and reducing to order what would otherwise be chaos. They may normally be indistinguishable in opinion, but as election times approach, or great controversies come up, they instinctively adopt opposite sides and present the issues in a form which the mass of voters can understand. And then finally when one has obtained power, the other may be relied upon to keep it in order and prevent it, if possible, from obtaining a second term of office.

Serious American politicians will freely admit much of the criticism commonly passed upon their politics, the tyranny of the machine, the corruption of the bosses, the evils of the spoils system and so forth ; but they will claim for it with justice that it performs an essential service to their country, which could be performed in no other way. In their view, the breaking up of their parties into groups, however faithfully and earnestly these might express the varieties of opinion, would threaten a community so little homogeneous and scattered over such vast spaces with inextricable confusion. This pragmatic defence of party politics as an organization of national affairs undoubtedly has weight, and it is too often forgotten by those who rail at parties. There are worse evils than the tyranny of parties.

Politicians, therefore, are well justified in making large sacrifices of unessentials for the greater good of keeping parties together. I once heard Joseph Chamberlain say that the breaking-up of his party was the greatest crime a statesman could commit, and that he held Gladstone beyond forgiveness because he had broken the Liberal party over the Irish question. Five years later Chamberlain himself had broken the Unionist party with his Tariff Reform policy. As a matter of fact, trust in the honest working of a party system is not a little founded on the belief that public men will for good cause break their party

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rather than stifle their convictions. In the public mind the party system was not injured, but rather vindicated, when Peel broke his party to repeal the Corn Laws, and when Bright, Hartington and Chamberlain revolted against Home Rule. Here was the guarantee that party discipline would not prevail over conviction. On the other hand the men with uncontrollable and pedantic consciences who were always voting against their parties, the too just umpires who were always giving their own side out, were never in favour with Parliament or the public. There have been many excellent men of this type, but the public and their fellow-members judge that too many of them would bring the whole parliamentary machine to a standstill. Aristides, if not banished, has to be kept in his place.

This is quite sound, for the function of a political party is not to discriminate between shades of permissible opinions, but to organize a dominant opinion for action. It is here that the literary and intellectual judgment of party politics usually goes astray. A political party cannot play with the novelties of thought which are attractive to nimble minds ; it must hammer at a few simple ideas until they become commonplaces to large numbers of ordinary people. Then only do they become ripe for action. This process is of course infinitely boring to men of adventurous and speculative minds, and they can generally see nothing in it but the battles of inferior men over second-rate ideas. Long before a thought has got to the stage of legislation in the actual world, the artist in Utopias has wearied of it and passed on to something else, leaving tired politicians and laborious journalists to trudge along with their " ancient dogmas " and " stale repetitions." The truth is that the two classes of men have separate functions. It is the *métier* of the thinker and the literary man to be free in their speculations and to trouble as little as possible about their practicability. It is the *métier* of the politician to get things done. The politician should always as far as possible pick the brains of the speculative thinker, but the complaint that he does not soar with him into the empyrean is absurd. Bagehot said boldly that politicians should

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be men of first-rate capacity and second-rate ideas, and he complained bitterly of the intrusion into politics of "ideas of unseasonable originality." Here he hit a certain part of the necessary truth about politics. Ideas, generally speaking, must have ceased to be original, before they become ripe for legislation.

The danger of party politics is that they tend to impose upon thought the restraints that are necessary for action. Before they can safely go ahead, parties must strike the common denominator of their adherents. But this necessary discipline does undoubtedly tend to drag party opinion down and to keep it in conventional ruts, unless the more adventurous spirits are always at work breaking new ground. The old two-party system had the great merit of reducing political issues to a choice of propositions grouped together as alternatives. It enabled the mass of voters to say yes or no to questions put to them in the simplest form. But this simplification was inevitably in some degree an artificial thing. The varieties of opinion must suffer in an attempt to squeeze them into two moulds, and opinions judged eccentric and unseasonable, as some of the highest value will inevitably be, tend to be squeezed out altogether in this process.

The same tendency is seen at work in a slightly different form in the attitude of politicians to social conditions. It is a great part of wisdom, as Burke said, to know how much of an evil it is necessary to tolerate, but it is always demoralizing to pretend that the tolerated evil is good. This is a very subtle temptation of practical politics. A vast deal of optimistic literature about the state of the poor produced in the nineteenth century wears the appearance, as one looks back on it, of having been produced to lull the consciences of politicians who had decided, for good or bad reasons, that it must be left alone. There was a respectable argument for leaving it alone, if it was candidly admitted that the evils complained of were real and great, and if private effort was invoked to deal with what was alleged to be beyond the sphere of the State. But when the political conscience had been lulled with the comfortable doctrines of *laissez-*

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faire, it was disastrous that the private conscience should be soothed with tales of unparalleled progress achieving itself without sacrifice or effort on the part of anyone. Political theory in this way encouraged a dangerous complacency which left industrialism to pile up wreckage on the assurance that all was well. The old Liberalism may be credited with many good things, but its habit of justifying the evils which it thought necessary to tolerate must certainly be set to the debit side of its account.

Politicians speak, in a manner which is exasperating to precise thinkers, of a thing being "all very well in theory but impossible in practice." What they mean, assuming a theory to be sound, is that the conditions which it presupposes do not exist or cannot be brought into existence at a given moment. This may very well be true, and, as Joseph Chamberlain used to say in his Radical days, politicians should always be ready to "accept a composition." But the contempt of theory by politicians may easily lead to the confusion of practical politics and inflict great wrong and suffering upon innocent people. The whole course of European politics from 1919 to 1924, as I have suggested in another chapter, may be summed up as a long, costly and disastrous process of verifying economic theories which were never in serious dispute. During all that period politicians played on the ignorance of ordinary folk with economic ideas which were as fantastic as Ptolemaic astronomy. There could be only one sequel to this, and it duly worked itself out in bitterness and impoverishment. If this is a necessary process in the art of government, there is no safety in democracy or any other method of ruling nations. Whether in domestic or in international politics, it is essential that politicians should make an end of this fatal empiricism and base themselves upon some foundation of acknowledged fact, which it should be *lèse majesté* for any party to dispute. Precisely because it is so easy to inflame passion and make capital for a brief period by trespassing on this ground, we need a mutual pact between politicians not to take advantage of each other by so doing. That would both save the public interest

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and concentrate party politics upon what is legitimately controversial, which in all conscience is a wide enough field.

2

I have said something in the previous chapters about the multiplication of parties ; let me now enter a little more in detail into what is at the present moment the most difficult question in British politics.

The rise of a third party should enrich the stock of ideas with which politicians work and add variety to their expression ; and if that were all, it should be undiluted gain. But it also raises very serious questions in what may be called the mechanics of politics. Can the existence of three parties be made compatible with efficient parliamentary government ? Will it help to educate the voters or merely confuse them ? Will it give honest men more freedom or dishonest and tricky ones greater opportunities for intrigue and wire-pulling ? These questions are in process of being answered, as they can only be, by experience, but a few general observations may be hazarded.

I vividly remember a talk on parliamentary institutions I had in Berlin some sixteen years ago with Prince Bülow who was then German Chancellor. He said that "responsible government," the system of governing by a Ministry responsible to a Parliament, had succeeded in England, and could succeed nowhere else. Most of the continental nations which had formed their institutions on the British model had made a mistake and were now discovering that, though they could copy its form, they could not reproduce its substance, which was the two-party system. The Prince spoke with great knowledge and much vivacity of the idiosyncrasies of continental politicians and the impossibility of getting them to subdue their nimble minds to the massive simplicity of the British model. That, he said, had been the slow growth of history and experience and was unique in all the world. The Americans had done wisely not to attempt to copy it, and the Germans were incapable of it. He wound up by giving me a vivid

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and humorous account of his difficulties with his *blocs*, how he had patiently and laboriously to construct them in order to get certain measures passed through the Reichstag, how they immediately fell to pieces when these measures were passed, and how the whole process had to be gone through again from the beginning before other measures could be presented with any prospect of carrying them into law. He had even, he said, to make and foment differences in order that the requisite parliamentary situation of a Government party and an Opposition party might be created.

His last word was that, if our two-party system ever failed us, we too should be driven to abandon our system of "responsible government."

So many things we thought permanent sixteen years ago have since proved to be crumbling and transient that we can scarcely dismiss this comment as the criticism of an envious foreigner. By all the continental analogies the appearance of a third party successfully challenging the exclusive pretensions of the other two to be "alternative Governments" ought greatly to increase the difficulty of working parliamentary institutions, if not to lead the whole way to the conclusion that Prince Bülow predicted. Have we any reason to think that we shall avoid these dangers?

3

On this question the nine months' experience of Labour Government in the session of 1924 is of more value than any theorizing, and it should be carefully examined while it is fresh in our minds. It is true that the return of the Conservative party to power with an overwhelming majority has restored the two-party system for one Parliament, but the interplay of the three parties is still of great importance in the constituencies, and another election may easily bring it back to the House of Commons. We had better, therefore, learn what we can while there is yet time.

When the Labour party took office in dependence on Liberal support, there was much speculation on the possi-

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bility of what was called a "new technique." The main points in this were two : (1) that the Government should submit to defeat on all but vital issues presented as votes of censure, and (2) that Parliament should legislate of its own free-will without control by the Government. The prospect thus opened up was hailed in some quarters as a welcome deliverance from the tyranny of the Executive, and so, on a superficial view, it seemed to be. But a very short experience served to prove that both ideas were contrary to the genius of the Sovereign Parliament. In spite of the explanation that a new system was at work, defeats of the Government proved still, as formerly, to be serious blows to its authority and prestige, since they revealed the precarious basis on which it rested for executive as well as for legislative purposes. No one could say at what moment the masters who were shaping or vetoing its legislation might not assert themselves by ending its existence as an Executive.

The idea of legislative freedom for Parliament proved equally impracticable. Throughout the session the country was in danger of being saddled with measures for which neither the Government nor either of the other parties would accept responsibility, the Opposition parties disclaiming their "principle" and the Government their details. At the end the Government was free to tell the electors that what it had done did not represent its own policy, and its opponents to say that it was not their policy. Under such a system it is more than a possibility that a considerable amount of legislation will receive the royal assent in a form which nobody wants or intends, and which all parties are at liberty to disown.

All ideas of this order confuse two different systems, the system of the Sovereign Parliament with the Executive responsible to it, and the system of the limited Parliament with the Executive detached from it. Under the first the legislative and the executive functions are indissolubly bound up with each other ; under the second the legislature can do what it chooses without compromising the Executive. A legislature thus free generally, as in the United States,

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produces a great deal of legislation which is not seriously intended to pass into law, and, as I have already pointed out, it is found necessary to arm the Executive with a veto on those measures for which it is not prepared to take responsibility. We should almost certain be under the same necessity in this country, if the principle of the "free Parliament" were adopted.

There is, therefore, no solution this way for the difficulties of the three-party system. A third party which supports a Government in Parliament must not suppose that it can shape either its policy or its legislation by hostile votes in the division lobby. Such influence as it can exert must be through consultation before a question is submitted to Parliament, and not in the division lobbies after that stage has been reached. However many parties there may be in the country, they must for parliamentary purposes be brigaded into two, and for the groups supporting a Government there is no half-way house between tendering that support consistently and withdrawing it.

Next, the question arises whether parties can maintain their separate existences in the constituencies, while combining for parliamentary purposes. The answer to this is equally decisive. Not if they are in hostile relationships in the constituencies. Under the present electoral system at all events, it is impossible for the same men to be friends in Parliament and enemies in the country. The Prime Minister in the last Parliament was perpetually in the position of urging the constituencies to reject members of the party upon whose support he was relying in Parliament, and by so doing he more than once succeeded in reducing his own majority. Human nature will not stand this: the hostile relations in the constituencies are bound to destroy the parliamentary alliance, and, in the meantime, to make that alliance appear absurd and hypocritical.

The failure to understand these mechanical conditions greatly contributed to the bitterness of the conflict between Liberal and Labour in the last weeks before the end of the experiment. Yet at the beginning both appear to have been honest in supposing that Parliament might be

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allowed to do what it chose without damage to the Government, and that the two parties might continue their operations in the country while combining to support the Government in the House of Commons. Mr. Lloyd George was, of course, right when he said after the election that the Liberal party ought in its own interests to have stipulated for regular consultation with the Government, and to this it may be added that Labour ought for the period of the Parliament to have proclaimed a truce in the constituencies. If these conditions were unacceptable, there were no others which offered the slightest chance of success, and Labour ought in its own interests to have postponed the opportunity of forming a Government to a more convenient season. To offer it the opportunity was eminently right and wise, but the successful use of it was only possible on these conditions.

4

The old parliamentarians thoroughly understood this logic of the party system. When the Liberal Unionists made their compact with the Conservatives in 1880 they did so on terms which secured the Conservative Government practically unqualified support in Parliament, and themselves immunity from attack in the constituencies. This "betrayal," as it was called, caused wrath and amazement among Home Rulers, especially against Chamberlain; and they could hardly believe their eyes when they read his speeches. But Chamberlain was a master of the mechanics of party politics in the British Parliament, and he knew that no politician, by whatever name he called himself, could at one and the same time be an opponent and a supporter of the Government he was keeping in power. And Lord Salisbury, on the other hand, knew that if he was to remain in power it was imperative for him to make the concessions required by his allies in return for their support.

We may take it then as conclusively proved that under the present parliamentary system there can be no successful

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alliance of two parties for the purpose of keeping a Government in power except on these terms. They are terms which by no means exclude differences of opinion between the two parties, but they do undoubtedly require that these differences shall be resolved into a sufficient unity for joint parliamentary action and, while that continues, for a truce in the constituencies. The question remains whether there is any different system, under which parties may combine in Parliament, and yet maintain a separate and even a fighting existence in the constituencies. Proportional representation would in all probability solve this part of the problem by giving all parties reasonable opportunities of pursuing their own propaganda and adding to the number of their adherents without coming into such conflict with each other as would prevent friendly relations in Parliament. How it would solve the question of bye-elections I do not know, but an occasional clash on these might not be of great importance, if the two parties were not normally on a hostile footing. If the three-party system has to be regarded as permanent, proportional representation is probably the only electoral system which will enable it to work smoothly and fairly.

But this leaves the problem in Parliament unsolved, and for that part of it the normal solution in countries where parties are multiplied is the *bloc* working within the period of the fixed-term Parliament. About that I have already recorded Prince Bülow's opinion, and the best that can be said of it is that it does somehow work. The French elector treats his Deputies as though they were a jury ; locks them in, so to speak, for four years and tells them to do the best they can with the business of governing the country for that period. The Deputies, thus interned, construct *blocs* which in fact brigade their groups into two parties for the purpose of carrying on ; and when these *blocs* break up, Governments fall and other Governments succeed them, without the electors being consulted until the four-year period expires. In a great emergency such as the menace of Boulangism in 1888, the Chamber can be dissolved with the consent of the Senate, but to dissolve

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it to meet the common exigencies of party politics would undoubtedly be considered an unconstitutional act on the part of President or Senate.

If annual elections became an institution as in the years between 1922 and 1924, the British public also might fly to the fixed term Parliament as the way of relief from an intolerable nuisance. But this also has grave drawbacks. Except in rare periods of national unity, it makes frequent changes of Government normal and expected ; it opens a wide door to intriguing, log-rolling and wire-pulling in the formation and disruption of *blocs*, and provides rich opportunities for fishers in troubled waters. Moreover, when Governments shift rapidly, power insensibly passes from them to permanent officials, who alone provide the stability which a country must find somewhere, if it cannot be found in its ephemeral Ministries. It is not an accident that the bureaucracy is to-day the strongest governing power in France. When the average of ministerial life is reduced to nine months, this follows almost of necessity.

5

Evidently there is no short cut to the solution of this problem, and one risks catastrophe when one hazards prediction. But I do not believe that we have done with the three-party problem or that we can consider ourselves absolved from thinking about it. In the present state of politics, a third party so corresponds with the nature of things that it is unlikely to be extinguished by the efforts of the other two. That politics should have to be presented as a choice between Conservatism and Socialism is for many thousands of intelligent people a counsel of despair. We do not react thus violently in our private affairs. We do not become vegetarians when we are dissatisfied with our butcher or fly to Christian Science because we have lost confidence in our doctor. A third party which offers the country an acceptable alternative between a Socialist Labour Government and a Protectionist Conservative Government may easily save the country from the evils

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of a class-war, and it is in any case the only form of expression for vast numbers of people to whom politics would otherwise be an incessant and disastrous choice of evils.

I have endeavoured to put the problem without partisan bias, but it may help to clarity if for a moment I speak frankly as a member of the party which it is the fashion of its opponents to describe as the most superfluous and the ripest for extinction. It is to me an absurdity to be told that I must throw in my lot either with Mr. Baldwin and the Duke of Northumberland or with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and Mr. Wheatley. However much respect personally I may have for these individuals, they all of them represent either an attitude of mind or some definite policy which I wish to discourage. But most of all I wish to discourage the brigading of classes into opposing ranks which is either the avowed aim or (as I think) the inevitable result of their respective policies. I acknowledge freely that it is quite natural that all of them should think me a nuisance and wish to get me out of the way, but for that very reason I feel it the more incumbent on me to endeavour to remain in existence.

In this I am greatly encouraged by the experience of the last six years. In December 1918 there was every reason to suppose that the Liberal party was dead, and there were the same expressions of pleasure mingled with respectful salutes to departed greatness then as in October, 1924. But in the next five years this extinct and buried party had immense and, as I think, most useful influence on the course of affairs. In particular it secured the defeat of Protection, and it ensured that the House of Commons took the right and wise course in deciding that Labour should have the same constitutional opportunity of governing the country as would be given in like circumstances to either of the other parties. Judging from the chorus of disapproval which greeted this decision, it must be presumed that the Conservative party would not have had the constitutional sense to reach it without Liberal compulsion, and at that juncture nothing could have been more im-

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portant. It is true that the experiment of a Labour Government failed, but there is all the difference in the world between Labour having been evicted from office by a free vote of the electors and its having been excluded from office by a combination of the two middle-class parties.

Looking back on this period and seeing how the Liberal party, reduced to twenty-five members in the 1918 Parliament, influenced the course of events in the subsequent years, I see no reason why it may not do the same in the coming years. Though in Parliament it may have a numerical strength far below what it is justly entitled to, a party commanding at least three million and much more, probably four million votes in the country, cannot be despised by either of its opponents.¹ Even if office is beyond its own reach, it may easily decide the fate of both of them at the next election, and the knowledge that it may do so is, in my opinion, extremely salutary to the other parties. It may prevent the Conservative party from taking advantage of a position which, impregnable as it may look, rests after all on only a minority of the voters ; and it may draw adherents from Labour, if Labour is tempted to impracticable or revolutionary courses. The future of course is inscrutable, but I cannot think of this steadying force being removed without the prospect being in nearly all respects worsened, and the country being brought sensibly nearer a dangerous clash of classes. Therefore it seems to me essential that the Liberal party should go on and that it should steadfastly resist all the counsels of indolence or despair which would scatter its forces and divide them between the other parties.

I do not ask the reader of Labour or Conservative opinions to agree with this estimate of Liberal utility ; I only ask him to consider it as the necessary point of view of those who hold Liberal opinions with any tenacity. These are not at all disposed to rail at the course of events

¹ This is a fair inference from the fact that in 1924 there were no Liberal candidates in 230 constituencies.

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which has obscured Liberalism since the war and put the electorate under various kinds of compulsion to express its judgment at the expense of the Liberal party. Paradox as it may seem, it is possible to believe in Liberalism and yet to recognize that in the circumstances in which they found themselves the mass of electors could have done nothing else than what they did in these years. But it is also possible to believe that Liberalism still comes very near the average of British political opinion, and that it would be a calamity to deprive this opinion of an organized mode of expression, because the times are against it. For these reasons I think it may be taken for granted that the three-party system will go on.

What then? To answer this question, let me try to gather up what has gone before. Certain mechanical difficulties may undoubtedly be removed by changes in electoral machinery, but these alone will not meet the case. Here, as elsewhere, the fact has to be faced that irreconcilable differences between a multiplicity of political sects cannot be fitted into the framework of a Sovereign Parliament. A Parliament detached from the Executive may provide these sects with congenial battle-ground, but in the Parliament which controls the Executive, their feuds must be sufficiently composed to enable the Government to be carried on. That has been discovered in France, where the political groups are under a perpetual compulsion to find common ground for the support of a Government; and it is also being discovered in Germany, where the continuance of sectional feuds may wreck the cause of parliamentary government and send the German people back to the old Reichstag with the Executive independent of it.

It is idle to suppose that if the British Parliament found itself in the same circumstances it would avoid their consequences unless it made a special effort to meet them; but it is not, I hope, unreasonable to believe that English politicians will be equal to this as to other parliamentary problems. The question is the familiar one of mutual forbearance in the cause of parliamentary government, and

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there is no other solution of it. Assuming that men can agree on the steps to be taken in the immediate or near future, the die-hardism which refuses co-operation—a sharply distinguishable thing from coalition—for the Government of the country is alien to the parliamentary spirit, and, if given full rein, must in the long run be disastrous to Parliament. The sects or groups may cherish their different ideals and remain free to pursue ultimate objects on which they differ, but in so far as they aspire to govern the country they must be prepared to act on common ground when the opportunity offers. It is not to be denied that the multiplicity of sects opens the door to insincere and dishonest combinations, but it is the test of good politics that these temptations should be resisted, and it is an unnecessary counsel of despair to suppose Englishmen incapable of this degree of virtue.

Assuming, then, that three parties will continue, the problems they present, though difficult, ought not to be insuperable. But one thing is clear. If the circumstances of 1924 arise again, the same experiment can never be repeated. A *bloc* to support a Government in Parliament must for the time being have the coherence and discipline of a party. The same people cannot be both enemies and friends, and though one group may entrust the other with the conduct of government, it must make its terms and both groups must abide by them. The experience of former years shows that this is feasible, but it requires that irreconcilables shall be kept in leash and practical politicians be willing to find the common ground on which the King's government can be carried on.

CHAPTER XX

THE STATESMAN AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Parliaments and Foreign Affairs—A Picture of the Old Europe—The Great Game of the Six Powers—Bismarck and Crispi—The "Sanctuary" of Patriotism—New Ideas and Retrospective Criticism—Statesmanship and War—The System—Duties of a Foreign Secretary—Apparatus and Design—Lack of Foresight—Bismarckism and Its Defects—The Technique of Foreign Affairs—The *Livre Noir*—A Verdict on British Diplomacy—Barbarism and Make-Believe—Germany and "the System."

I

THE discussion of parliamentary problems belongs mainly to domestic politics, but it has been brought home to us in the last ten years that storms from without are beating on nearly all the Parliaments of the world, and that whether they stand or fall depends not only on their internal constitutions, but on their capacity to resist these blasts and to hold their own in their dealings with other Parliaments and Governments. If the relations of countries with each other continued to be what they were in the thirty years before the war, we could not flatter ourselves that the most perfect parliamentary institutions built up on the most approved democratic models would be proof against the forces which threaten all systems resting on the assumption that argument and reason will prevail. More than any other statesman or Minister the Foreign Secretary is entrusted with the guardianship of democratic institutions in these times, and at this point it may be useful to consider how he has acted or been obliged to act, and in what sort of world he has been moving and acting for the greater part of the lifetime of men now living.

Many learned historians have described in detail the transactions of diplomatists and statesmen in the years

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before the war, but few of them have conveyed so many of the salient facts with such point and brevity as Professor Gaetano Salvemini in a lecture which he delivered at King's College in the autumn of 1923. Let me quote one passage :

When the revolt of Bosnia-Herzegovina first broke out, the Italian Government foresaw that the Austrian Government would occupy that country, and, as compensation for this aggrandisement of Austria, Italy wanted to obtain from Austria the Trentino. But the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrassy, was always declaring that Austria would not surrender "a single village." On the contrary, in agreement with the Russian Government, he advised Italy to occupy Tunisia.

For Italy, the occupation of Tunisia meant facing war with France. Moreover, no one in Italy was at all inclined to let the prospect of a colony distract his attention from the problem of the national frontier. Thus Austria's attempt at inciting Italy to occupy Tunisia in 1876 was unsuccessful ; and in 1877 the proposal of Bismarck and Lord Derby that Italy should occupy Albania also failed.

In January 1878 the Russian forces arrived at the gates of Constantinople and imposed the Treaty of San Stefano on the Turkish Government. Confronted with the danger of Russian predomination in the East, the "League of the Three Emperors" broke up ; and an *entente* between Austria and England, with the support of Germany, was formed against Russia. To prevent France from joining with Russia, Bismarck again brought up the idea of offering Tunisia to France. The English Government acquiesced in Bismarck's plan, and in May 1878 the offer was laid before Paris. The possibility of a Franco-Russian alliance being thus disposed of, Russia was reduced to impotence. This was also the case with regard to Italy.

At the Congress of Berlin Austria was empowered to occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina ; England declared that, in agreement with Turkey, she was occupying Cyprus ; and France was given liberty of action by the German and English Governments in regard to Tunis. While this game of compensations was going on during the Congress of Berlin Count Bülow, Bismarck's *alter ego*, hinted to the first Italian plenipotentiary that "Italy should take possession of Tunis" ; Bismarck always tried to bring about a conflict between Italy and France, offering the same reward to both countries.

Lord Salisbury advised the second Italian plenipotentiary to seek

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compensations "in the direction of Tripoli and Tunis." He probably thought that the Governments of Paris and Rome would have been able to come to an agreement ; France would have got Tunis, and Italy Tripoli. The French Government also repeatedly offered the Italian Government a free hand in regard to Tripoli on the understanding that Italy would renounce all interests in Tunis. The Italian Government refused all these propositions. It demanded the maintenance of the status quo in Tunisia without having the power to enforce its will.

In 1881 the crisis developed. The French Government, encouraged by Bismarck, occupied Tunisia. Irritated by so many failures, and exasperated with France, Italian public opinion forced on the Government the conclusion of an alliance with the Central Powers. In this atmosphere of irritation, humiliation, and anxiety, the first Treaty of the Triple Alliance was drawn up and concluded during the early months of 1882. (*Times*, Oct. 10, 1923.)

Details in this statement may be criticized, but it may, I think, be taken as roughly a correct account of the great game as played in these years. The picture is clear and vivid. We see the six great Powers manœuvring with each other for the succession to the crumbling Ottoman Empire in Europe and Africa—the game in Asia has not yet begun—and among them is one consummate performer who sits in Berlin and endeavours to weave a web round the rest and embroil them in conflict with each other. His advantage is that he is not himself for the moment on the pounce. He has sated his appetite, and needs time to digest, but he is aware that this may not be given him if his neighbours, and particularly France and Russia, are permitted to combine, and the youthful and vigorous Power, Italy, is lured into their camp ; still less, if in these perilous years Great Britain should take the side of his envious neighbours and rivals. So to keep them all quiet with the Eastern question—supposed in those days not to be worth the bones of one Pomeranian—and to foment discord and drive wedges between them becomes his absorbing occupation.

He plays this game with consummate skill and an entire lack of scruple, which he is not at all ashamed to confess. His bland avowals in his own *Reminiscences*, or as re-

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corded by his creature Busch, are indeed positively terrifying, if one reads them with any sense of Nemesis waiting on human affairs. If lightning could be called down from heaven, one might suppose it would be at the moment when, having given France "liberty of action in regard to Tunis," he sent his henchman Count Bülow to suggest to the Italians that they should seize Tunis, knowing full well that if his hint were taken the result must be a bloody struggle between them and the French. Crispi, who seems to have been in some respects a very simple man, has recorded that when he visited Bismarck at Friedrichsruh in 1887 he wrote in Princess Bismarck's album, "In this sanctuary of patriotism, where vigil is kept for the maintenance of the peace of Europe, I leave a memory."¹ But by that time Bismarck had won his game, for the French had taken his advice and the Italians been driven, as he intended, to find safety and compensation in the Triple Alliance.

Such was the "vigil" which was kept in this "sanctuary," and it is clear from Crispi's memoirs that he knew all about it and saw no harm in it. All the performers on this scene were aware that their opponents—or, for that matter, their friends—would outwit them if they could, and they respected Bismarck as the cleverest and most audacious of the tribe. Reading the memoirs and records of these times, one is struck by the entire absence of moral assumptions in any of the camps. Gladstone now and again broke in upon the scene with appeals to the Ten Commandments, which Bismarck considered most untimely; but the general conclusion of the experts and of a large number of his own countrymen was that these outbursts marked Gladstone as an inferior performer, whose sentimental ideas of right and wrong were partly hypocrisy and partly folly, and in either case a serious disqualification for playing the game with the cool realism which was the condition of success. This, in a measure, was true. Gladstone was always extremely clumsy at the technique of this business, and he was as little at home in it as his rival Disraeli was in domestic affairs. A passion for abstract

¹ "Memoirs of Francesco Crispi," English translation, II, 221.

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things like justice and nationality perpetually compelled him to rush in upon the players, and his peculiar naïveté prevented him from playing their game with any skill when he got involved in it. Nevertheless, he almost alone in these years kept Europe reminded that ideas of right and wrong entered, in some measure, into international affairs.

2

It may or may not be that the conditions are changed in these times ; but one change there certainly is. The controversy about the basis of European policy which has gone on incessantly since the Great War has led large numbers of people to apply an ethical standard to international dealings. The homage paid to the League of Nations, whether sincere or otherwise, has at least had that effect. Hence a vast deal of retrospective criticism of the old diplomacy which applies to it a standard which it neither acknowledged nor attempted to enforce. Until 1918 there never was any question of abolishing war or dispensing with it as the *ultima ratio*. Kant had dreamt of universal peace ; the Congress of Vienna had planned a Europe in which the peace would be forcibly kept by a few despots ; a few " Friends " and pacifists had proclaimed that war was sin, a few economic theorists had proved that it must be a gigantic loss. But all practical politicians of whatever party had assumed that war was a necessary evil, and that it must be provided for by some sort of preparation. The Liberal, it is true, thought of idealistic wars, as for the rescue of the victims of Turkish tyranny ; and the Tory of materialistic wars, as for the defence of British interests against Russian, French or German aggression ; but neither put war out of their account or declared it to be in all circumstances a thing to avoid. Even John Bright protested against the popular notion that he was against fighting in all circumstances, as indeed he was bound to, when he passionately defended the North in the American Civil War for taking up arms to resist slavery and secession.

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It was war, in fact, which ultimately gave its glamour to the thing called statesmanship. If one tries to recall the ideas which came into one's mind when the word statesman was heard in the mouths of parents or elders fifty years ago, they will be found, I think, to be predominantly ideas of war. The statesman was one who held the keys of life and death for multitudes of humble people, who had terrible secrets in his keeping, who was bowed down with awful responsibilities, who kept lonely vigils over the perils of the world. He was tall, white-haired, grave of countenance, and bore himself with a stately reserve which it would have been sacrilege to invade. One never thought of a mayor or a town councillor in that way, nor even of Members of Parliament except that they were on the fringe of the great thing called statesmanship, on which peace and war depended. This was the real heart of the business, and the politicians who wished to impress you talked mysteriously of things they knew but could not say, of crises and conflicts and peace hanging on a thread.

Next, it was generally acknowledged that these great affairs were the special business of kings, nobles and aristocratic persons. Ambassadors, Foreign Secretaries, diplomatists of all grades, even clerks at the Foreign Office, all belonged to the aristocratic caste. They alone were supposed to have the manners and to speak the language of the "Courts" in which great affairs were transacted. They alone could be trusted with the secrets which had to be imparted to the inner ring. The present generation has cried out against secret diplomacy, but to the previous generation the idea of diplomacy being anything but secret was almost a contradiction in terms. The British House of Commons held Ministers responsible to it, but it seldom or never presumed to press for an answer when the Foreign Secretary put his finger to his lips. Inside the circle elegant people with beautiful manners might gamble with human lives or toy with high explosives, but they were all agreed that the peace and safety of the world absolutely depended on letting nobody else know what they were doing. And very often they were right. So long as the game went

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on, its dangers were limited by excluding an audience which must have taken sides. What a Foreign Secretary feared in nine cases out of ten was not the craft of his opponent but the too zealous backing of his own side, which would have cut off his retreat. Keep the public out of it, and it was a relatively safe game ; let the public in, and it instantly became full of deadly peril. As a rule the public were only let in when the Foreign Secretary or his Government had decided not to retreat.

From this it might be inferred that the statesmen who dealt in foreign affairs were men of a sinister type; but that would be a complete misunderstanding. Many of them were high-minded men, pious men, sincerely pacific men. The system they worked under was a thousand years old : they inherited it, saw no alternative to it, did their best with it. Custom had so habituated them to its fundamental ideas that no one stepped aside to criticize them or to question their necessity. Foreign Secretaries came and went, and each as he departed heaved a sigh of relief if the peace had been kept in his time. Most of them, contrary to general belief, had no policy beyond that of living from day to day and escaping disaster in the perplexing and irrational world in which they moved. They perceived instinctively that to attempt to reform this world or to call upon a foreign Government to repent and amend its ways was an enterprise of deadly peril, which was outside their duty as trustees for their own countrymen. Campbell-Bannerman tried it by inviting the world to limit its armaments in 1906, and he found, to his immense astonishment, that he was supposed to have issued an ultimatum to Germany.¹ In the years before 1914 a determined peace-maker was only less dangerous to the peace than a Prussian militarist. It was as easy to quarrel about peace as about territory or trade, and it was observed, not without justice, that Liberal and peace-loving Foreign Secretaries had blundered or stumbled into more wars than Tory or Jingo ones.

¹ "Life of Campbell-Bannerman," II, 330-1.

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The two British parties have generally been agreed about the kind of man they wanted for Foreign Secretary. One sees the generalized type as a peer of ancient family, who spoke French fluently and was supposed to be at home in European capitals—a man of capacious brain, but cautious and adroit of speech rather than brilliant or daring, standing a little aloof from party politics, absorbed in his immense responsibilities. That certain eminent people should in no circumstances whatever occupy this position was the fixed resolve of both parties. Whoever has witnessed the formation of a Government will be aware of the vetoes imposed in both camps upon certain apparently well-qualified candidates for this office. Agreement was universal that they might have any and every office except this. Lord Curzon is perhaps the only man in our time who has overcome an almost unanimous opinion in the inner circle that he could be anything but Foreign Secretary. Every Cabinet is more or less afraid of its Foreign Secretary. He may wreck them by a single stroke, commit them to they know not what, keep a dangerous transaction in his own hands till it is too late for them to come in, impart a different meaning from what the Government intends by a phrase or a word in a dispatch. He may have the most honourable intentions, but if he thinks differently from his colleagues, he can hardly help himself. In nine cases out of ten he simply must act on his own initiative. The whole business of the Office would be brought to a standstill if it were necessary to consult the Cabinet on more than a few urgent questions ; and needlessly to multiply these was one of the sure signs of a bad Foreign Secretary.

Since the days of Palmerston British Cabinets have seldom had to complain that a Foreign Secretary has gone beyond their intention. There is no office which more quickly quenches a wayward or dangerous ambition. The Foreign Secretary coming new into office finds himself entangled in a network of treaties, pledges, assurances—

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some public, some secret, some written, some merely verbal or implied. On every subject there is a mass of material for which the archives must be ransacked before any step is taken, lest he put his foot unwarily into a trap. Tradition in the last years before the war required him to give a formal assurance to the ambassadors of foreign Powers that British policy was unchanged by the arrival of a new Government in power, and this assurance was sometimes given before the new Foreign Secretary had clearly ascertained what the policy of his predecessors was. Under this principle of "continuity" the ground for free manœuvres had become an extremely narrow ledge, and if he did not wish to throw Europe (as well as his colleagues) into convulsions, a prudent man quickly came to the conclusion that unseasonable originality was, above all things, to be avoided.

Further, the Foreign Office imposes incessant and exhausting labour upon its occupant. In the days before the war it was undoubtedly the most laborious of all the public offices. I have heard Foreign Secretaries say that to read and minute the papers submitted to them must take a conscientious man eight hours a day, to say nothing of the interviews and the recording of interviews, the writing of memoranda and dispatches, and the preparation of speeches or answers to questions in Parliament. Often I have asked the question whether a great deal of this work could not be delegated, so as to leave the Secretary of State free for the few really important questions which needed thought and decision, and always the answer was the same. The Foreign Office was said to differ from all other offices in that no one could say with certainty what questions were important or unimportant, or what seemingly unimportant questions might not boil up into an incident or a quarrel which might be extremely inconvenient to the Government if not to the country. So the Foreign Secretary was every day taken a tour of the world and presented with papers from Bangkok, Rio, Cairo, Petersburg, Constantinople, Washington, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and expected to examine the last consular dispute in Lisbon or Naples with the same

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attention that he would give to a crisis between France and Germany.

The thing was a physical impossibility, and a too conscientious man either broke down under the strain or brought a blurred and tired brain to his greater responsibilities. The wiser plan, since the impossible was demanded, was to take the risk of initialling the greater number of papers unread, in the generally well-justified hope that all would come right. But, whichever plan was adopted, the routine was overwhelming, and the last man to see foreign affairs in the romantic and imaginative way in which the public commonly regarded them was the Foreign Secretary. No one was more surprised than Lord Grey to read of the far-reaching Machiavellian schemes attributed to him by newspapers while he plodded through the daily routine of his office. A British Minister commonly considered himself fortunate if he could look after British interests for twenty-four hours without getting himself into a scrape.

4

The great difficulty about the old diplomacy was that in most of the countries in which it was practised its apparatus was wholly unequal to its designs. On their own hypothesis of the kind of world they were living in and the kind of game they were playing, the European Governments were immensely inefficient. To ensure success, every Foreign Office ought to have had a General Staff which studied the mechanics of each problem in the light of intelligence regularly supplied by the most efficient Secret Service. Every Foreign Secretary ought to have known exactly what forces he was measured against, and what he could bring against them. Force being the acknowledged basis of all operations, the coolest and most scientific estimate of an opponent's strength should have been the first rule. Combined with this there should have been a dispassionate measurement of the moral forces which might set the physical in motion or turn weakness into strength

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at a critical moment. As we look back on the past, the world seems in all its emergencies to have come up against that great deficiency in human nature which renders those who are supreme in handling the physical forces incapable of judging the moral forces, and on the other hand makes those who are sensitive to the moral forces mere bunglers with the physical forces. Germany, which was supreme in the realistic politics of physical force, went blindly to destruction from her contempt of the moral problem ; England challenged Napoleon and rushed to war for the scrap of paper, but was always an amateur at the military game.

British diplomacy during the nineteenth century seems to the modern eye like an audacious game of bluff with a military force which was small, antiquated and altogether unequal to the tasks proposed for it. Whether it was an instinctive trust in our sea power, which nineteenth-century statesmen mostly took for granted rather than made sure of, or the inherent love of a gamble which is in the British character, or mere light-heartedness, we struck blow after blow for nationality and liberty, and asserted our rights, even in dubious cases, with a confidence in our naked fists that was splendidly reckless. In another chapter I have analysed the transaction in which Palmerston in 1864 all but committed this country—then totally unprepared—to a life-and-death struggle with the rising military power of Prussia. We see him confessing to Lord John Russell that if we went to war with Prussia the total force we could put into the field would be 20,000 men—20,000 armed with muzzle-loading rifles—against 200,000 or 300,000 Prussians armed with the new breech-loading rifle.¹ Yet this avowal, made calmly, candidly and without shame, does not prevent him and Russell from fighting valiantly for that desperate enterprise against—happily—the united opposition of their junior colleagues. There is a Providence which looks after the British Empire or it must have been wrecked upon the incompetence of statesmen who took these appalling risks by playing the great game in total disregard of its most elementary rules.

¹ February 13, 1864. "Life of Palmerston," vol. II, 430.

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If we compare contemporary British records during these years with what we now know to have been actually the course of events in other countries, we are struck at every turn with the lack of accurate knowledge and therefore of intelligent foresight of events. If Palmerston knew of Bismarck's existence—of which there is no evidence—he plainly had not the slightest idea of what he stood for or what forces were behind him. In the volume of *Essays on Foreign Affairs* by the late Lord Salisbury, mostly written a year after Bismarck had forcibly extinguished the Prussian Reichstag in order to quench its resistance to the making of the great Prussian army—a stroke which one would have supposed must have resounded through Europe—we fail to find a mention of Bismarck's name. It is Lord Salisbury's decided opinion that the Germans are a nation of impracticable dreamers and sentimentalists incapable of unity.¹ Yet Bismarck was at that moment in the middle of the remorseless sequence of "preventive" wars which was to weld the German Empire in blood and iron, and within a few months he had attacked Austria. Six years later Lord Granville was confident that peace was never so well assured as on the day before the Franco-German War broke out, and all well-informed Englishmen were persuaded that the one dangerous and formidable man in Europe was the Emperor Napoleon III, when, in fact, as we now know, he was a hopeless invalid, clinging wearily to his throne, and completely at the mercy of his German opponent. We may search the records and fail to discover any war which was foreseen except by those who deliberately planned it, any great popular or national movement which was rightly interpreted and its consequences realized. Gladstone was convinced that Jefferson Davis had made a nation; and instructed opinion was unanimous that the victory of the North was an impossibility.

Some of these mistakes may be ascribed to the natural infirmity of the human judgment; others are plainly due to a lack of knowledge which could and ought to have been

¹ *Essays* by Robert, Marquess of Salisbury, "Foreign Politics," p. 143.

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supplied by intelligent staff-work. Though their problem was, on their own showing, essentially a military problem, the old statesmen were for the most part without any of the apparatus which would have enabled them to reckon on a successful campaign. They had either no maps or wrong ones ; the danger-points on their campaigning ground were either not marked or marked wrongly. When knowledge failed, they guessed, and generally guessed wrongly. Small wonder that for forty years they were at the mercy of the one professional who handled the business scientifically, who took enormous pains to discover the strength and weakness of his opponents, who planned his strokes with the same precision as the soldiers who backed him in the field, and so timed these strokes as to give the soldiers the utmost advantage over the enemy. Clausewitch's saying that war is the continuation of policy gains meaning and reality from the study of Bismarck's practice. There is no trace in it of the Nietzschean or Treitschkean fantasy about war being a necessary medicine of humanity. War to Bismarck was simply the means of gaining a political end, to be avoided if possible, to be undertaken coolly and scientifically after all possible measures had been taken to divide and weaken the enemy and cut him off from allies and support. The weakness of Bismarck's method was that the chances were a hundred to one against finding a successor to him, when he departed from the scene, who could be trusted to pursue it with the coolness and precision that made it relatively safe. The period of danger for Germany and for all Europe set in when this deadly game was played between pseudo-Bismarcks and amateurs, none of whom understood the forces they were dealing with or the risks they were running. If Europe had been in the hands of half a dozen Bismarcks who understood each other's methods and had a wholesome respect for each other's strength, it is highly probable that, like the bosses of the great commercial trusts, they would have decided to keep the peace and to relieve each other of competition in armaments. A Europe so bossed might not have been an agreeable place for free men to live in, but in such

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hands the game of power politics might have been played with relative safety. In all others it was bound to come to disaster.

In Bismarck's view all British statesmen were subject to one great disqualification when they sought to enter the intimate circle of European diplomacy. This was that they were answerable to Parliament—a condition which no self-respecting Foreign Secretary could be expected to accept. "The greatest difficulty," he wrote in 1882, "that we encounter in trying to give a practical expression to our sympathies for and our relations with England, is in the absolute impossibility of confidential intercourse in consequence of the indiscretion of English statesmen in their communications to Parliament, and in the absence of security in alliances for which the Crown is not answerable in England, but only the fleeting Cabinets of the day. It is, therefore, difficult to initiate a reliable understanding with England otherwise than publicly, and in the face of all Europe. Such public negotiations, from their initiation and even without arriving at any definite result, would be highly detrimental to most of our European relations."¹ This is a natural comment from the statesman who reinsured his open alliance with Austria by a secret agreement with Russia, and we may take it as no bad compliment to British diplomacy. But undoubtedly during these years the players of the great game, whether in Berlin, Paris, Vienna or Petersburg, regarded British statesmen as outside their circle and liable by their ignorance, indiscretion and lack of touch and tradition very seriously to disturb the performances of the more skilful players.

5

The technique of the Foreign Secretary in nineteenth-century Europe was a slippery business, but it had rules of its own which were known to all initiates, and there were loud complaints in the inner circle when these were not observed. Deliberately to say the thing-that-was-not either

¹ Letter quoted in Lord Fitzmaurice's "Life of Lord Granville," II, 277.

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in dispatches or public speeches was always against the code, and would in any case have been regarded as an artless crudity. The economy of truth was a different matter, and this undoubtedly was raised to a fine art. To balance himself delicately on phrases which could have one meaning to those who knew and quite another to those who did not, to say things in such a manner that their apparent meaning could be indignantly disclaimed, if it threatened trouble, and to leave an opponent in doubt what he meant, and exactly how much of it he would stand to, if challenged, were a large part of the Foreign Secretary's accomplishments, and a highly elaborate technical language was devised for his assistance. The dispatches of these times are full of secret signals and ciphers, the clue to which has been lost in subsequent times, and not a few of them missed fire even in their own time because their meaning was so elaborately concealed that nobody could discover it. Moving in this world Bismarck used to boast that he deceived everybody by telling the truth, which to the old diplomatist was the greatest mystification of all. But Andrassy or Schouvaloff or Disraeli or Salisbury would undoubtedly have regarded it as a serious reflection on their competence, let alone their honesty, if anyone had alleged that they told untruths. They did nothing so clumsy.

Nevertheless, I have a boyish recollection that a "Salisbury" was once a synonym for a departure from exact veracity, a "terminological inexactitude" as Mr. Churchill would say. It all arose out of the tiresome business of the *Globe* and the Schouvaloff memorandum. That enterprising journal published—a day after the Berlin Congress had assembled in 1878—the text of a secret agreement between Lord Salisbury and Count Schouvaloff which showed that practically the whole of the drama about to be acted on the Berlin stage had been rehearsed and agreed beforehand between these two statesmen. There had been rumours that such an agreement existed, but a few days before, Lord Salisbury had described them as unauthentic and unworthy of serious attention. No incident could have

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been more annoying to a Foreign Secretary. It took all the heart out of the play ; it confirmed the painful impression already existing among the professional diplomatists of ancient monarchies—that the British Foreign Office was not to be trusted with secrets ; it spoilt the current belief that England had won a great victory over Russia by compelling her to submit to the Berlin Congress ; and it placed Lord Salisbury in a very awkward predicament. How one could wish to have been present at the moment when Salisbury explained the situation to Disraeli, and to have heard the comment of that old fox. The subject may be commended to the makers of imaginary conversations. But I think I am right in saying that practically the whole diplomatic world judged Salisbury to have been justified in his denial. The argument was that if an intrusive questioner puts you in a position in which a refusal to answer is tantamount to the admission of something which you are pledged to keep secret, the blood is on his head if you have to tamper with the truth. But if Europe was indulgent on the point of casuistry, it was unanimous that the clumsiness which permitted the secret to leak out was unpardonable, and the old professionals were more than ever of opinion that the British Foreign Office could not be trusted with their confidences.

There are no documents which more vividly convey the atmosphere of the pre-war Foreign Offices than those which will be found in the Bolshevist publication known as the *Livre Noir*.¹ These have been quarried by assailants of the old diplomacy, as the publishers of them intended them to be, but when their moral uses have been exhausted there remains a picture which the historian may cherish. The curtain is raised on a scene of feverish activity. All the Foreign Offices except our own stand revealed as spying on each other, and even Allies tap each other's wires and keep records of intercepted dispatches. Throughout Europe Ambassadors, consuls and secret agents are incessantly at work keeping their chiefs at home informed of the drift of events, and priming them with

¹ Librairie du Travail, Paris.

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gossip about the characters of public men and the little weaknesses and idiosyncrasies which make them accessible to one kind of approach or another. Some of these emissaries take credit for their skill in bribing newspapers and conducting a furtive propaganda of which the sources will not be suspected. Others forward reports of military and naval movements with cheerful acceptance of the fact that "general war" is the inevitable conclusion, if so and so goes a little nearer the abyss or a certain Emperor is a little more wrong-headed than he habitually is. Looking back on it with our knowledge of the sequel we may wonder that these clever diplomatists and Foreign Secretaries could have gone so energetically about their business, or even retained their sanity in a world which was so evidently toppling about their heads; but we may search in vain for any trace of the sense of sin which the after-war moralist reads into their proceedings. They are as innocent as man before the fall, and accept the postulates of their world in the unquestioning spirit which conceives no other possible. It would be a profound mistake to say that they rejected the idea of an international order; they lived in a world in which, as philosophers say, this idea could not be thought.

The *Livre Noir* is full of excellent reading. If the Russian Empire could have been saved or its Foreign Office have been made efficient by keen wits and clever pens, nothing could have gone wrong with it. Isvolsky, Sazonof and Benckendorff write as good letters as may be found in any recent biographies. They understand every point in the game, and their judgments are shrewd and witty. Isvolsky's estimate of Poincaré was abundantly justified by after-events; Count Benckendorff's appreciations of British politics before the war are fit to compare with Mr. Walter Page's. We may read these disclosures without discomfort, and even take a certain pleasure in the unanimity of the dispatch-writers that we were slow to move and hard to persuade, being inordinately given over to the pursuit of social Utopias in our domestic politics. All through there is the echo of Bismarck's complaint that parliamentary

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government disqualified us for these games. Respect for Sir Edward Grey goes hand in hand with impatience at the difficulty of inducing him to take any step when he is not sure of his ground or to depart from his stubborn but impracticable condition that Parliament must approve. The British Foreign Secretary as measured by his foreign colleagues comes out as a little too good for this world and too honest to be admitted to the final intimacies of the inner circle. Isvolsky knows every trick and is, above all, a master in Bismarck's game of handling the Press. Again and again he appeals to his Government for money and more money to procure the insertion of desirable articles, pointing dolefully to the success which another Government has obtained by a wise liberality and gleefully to his own triumphs when he has been liberally provided. "I am doing everything in my power," he writes cheerfully from Paris on Dec. 18, 1892, "to work upon the Press (*agir sur la presse*). I do not intervene directly in the distribution of subsidies, but this distribution, in which the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance take part, is to all appearances effective and attains its object." How was a British Foreign Secretary, who had no secret-service funds, who held old-fashioned views about Ministers and newspapers and the incorruptibility of the Press, and whose agent in Paris was Sir Francis Bertie, to hold his own among these very accomplished performers?

Looking back on it in the light of the sequel the thing revealed in this record may cause a shudder, but a universal tradition made the Foreign Office the most elegant form of service in all European countries. The Foreign Secretary was supposed to be the finest gentleman in the Government of which he was a member; suavity, accomplishment, good manners, and impeccable breeding were exacted from all who served him. Yet the material he dealt with was compounded of primitive passions, racial and tribal animosities and large obscure explosive forces which were least amenable to genteel argument. Domestic policy had struggled upwards into the domain of law; foreign policy was still on the plane of the animal struggle for

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existence. It was no doubt an instinct that the thing was fundamentally barbarous which led to its being wrapped up in this flummery of make-believe. The relative civilization of men within their tribes makes them shrink from recognizing the barbarism of their relations outside them. Their attitude is like the deadly politeness of the duellist who is bent on killing as compared with the rough and tumble of the footballers who are out to win a game. But the forms of diplomacy had the serious drawback of concealing from those who were engaged in it the deadly nature of the trade in which they were employed. They were involved in an enormous seemingly innocent correspondence in which the real forces at work were constantly obscured ; they had to guess the intentions of their opponents from hints and phrases which convention would not permit to be explicit ; and the more honest of them were inevitably at a disadvantage with schemers who thought all things lawful in the pursuit of power.

Who these schemers are (or were) is generally not discovered till a generation has gone by and we are still debating whether in the last twenty years they were of one nationality or three. But the historical judgment on the system is one thing and the judgment on the parts played by particular nations quite another. It is, I believe, entirely rational to regard the system as an abomination and yet to hold that the parts played by certain nations which inherited it or became involved in it were brave and honest. So after studying these records, and perhaps the more from studying them, an Englishman may continue to think of the part which his country played in 1914. But for us as for others, criticism of the system and full realization of what the results must be, if now it is given a fresh lease of life, remain imperative duties.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STATESMAN IN WAR

War and Politics—A Popular Delusion—The Civilian Minister and His Responsibilities—Lincoln and the American Civil War—A Military Decision—Complications of Politics and Strategy—Trusting the Soldiers and the Result—A Civilian Commander-in-Chief—His Unpopularity—Bismarck in Tears—His Struggles with Soldiers—Their Reprisals—Bethmann-Hollweg and the Unrestricted Submarine—A Terrible Decision—Conflict with Kaiser and General Staff—A Telegram to Hindenburg—Passing Judgment—War and Politics in England—The Dardanelles Campaign—The Blockade—Asquith and Lloyd George—Easterners and Westerners—Lloyd George's Publicity—Uses in War-time—Credulity in War—Some War Victims.

I

PUBLIC men are accustomed to speak of the responsibility of their calling, but happily for their peace of mind the full meaning of the phrase is hidden from most of them in ordinary times. The zest of the game, the pursuit of its prizes, the business of speech-making and campaigning, carry them along from day to day with a sense of agreeable excitement in which there is nothing tragic. Mistakes will be made but they are reparable ; the politician may say that the victory of his opponents will be the ruin of the country, but in his heart he knows this to be only a manner of speech. Then one day war looms in sight, and for the first time the game takes on a terrible realism. Suddenly it is brought home to the players that the stakes are the lives of thousands, it may be millions, of men and the veritable existence of their country.

Any war is serious, and a long war is almost always disastrous, to the politicians who embark on it. The transition from peace to war requires sudden mental adjustments of which few men are capable. The Minister is carried

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without warning into a world in which all his familiar landmarks are wiped out. He is at the mercy of expert advice for which, nevertheless, he must take full responsibility. He must stand aside while the soldiers act, yet with the sure knowledge that the consequences will fall on him if they fail. He must steel himself to the thought that he will be held accountable for death and desolation in thousands of homes. He must be prepared to deal with incalculable hazards instead of the relative certainties of ordinary administration. The longest experience and the finest record as a peace Minister are no guarantee that he will be equal to this emergency, or that he will have the imaginative grasp of the meaning of war, which is the greatest of all the qualities of the War Minister.

There is a popular belief that when war is declared the part of the civilian Minister is merely to supply the soldiers with what they need and to await the military event. "My work is done, now let the cannon speak." Nothing could be further from the truth. The civilian Minister finds himself compelled, generally much against his will, to act as arbiter of strategy. War is not an exact science, in which experts can point the road to a given end ; it is a perpetual groping among dubious alternatives between which the civilian Government has to choose. There are all the time rival experts with conflicting plans which must be submitted to the judgment of Cabinet or War Council. If it is a great war, it will touch the interests of nearly all the neutrals ; and from the first moment the Foreign Offices of the belligerents will be at work soothing and cajoling them, endeavouring to bring them in on their own side or to prevent the enemy from bringing them in on his side. This will probably hamper military operations, and soldiers and sailors will strain at the leash while the Government puts its veto on schemes which look highly effective as operations of war, but which may have the result of turning a neutral into an enemy. In many of these cases, explanation is impossible and the civilian Minister must bear patiently the imputation of being supine or obstructive. It is the soldier's duty to put the military view

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without qualification ; it is the Minister's duty to supply the qualifications which policy may require, and these are nearly always suspect and unpopular.

It is small wonder if friction arises between Ministers and soldiers or if in a long war there are heavy sacrifices of both to appease an anxious public. Seldom in a long war has the Minister who was chiefly responsible for bringing his country into it held his place to the peace. Palmerston succeeds Aberdeen ; Lloyd George supersedes Asquith ; in France, Germany, Austria, Italy, the tale of Ministers overthrown or exhausted by the Great War is past counting. Governments are sometimes suspected of seeking relief from internal troubles by making war, but if we may judge from history, there could scarcely be a less desirable exchange for the most distracted Ministry.

2

But let me leave generalities, and briefly examine the experiences of certain eminent civilian statesmen who have had to carry their countries through great wars during the last seventy years. Among these President Lincoln is first in time, and in some ways still the most conspicuous.

Abraham Lincoln came to his great office entirely innocent of the military art except for a few weeks' service when a young man as a volunteer captain against an Indian tribe, and even in that he had seen no fighting. On the day after his inauguration in March 1861, he was required to make a military decision of the first importance. Should Fort Sumter be held or evacuated ? Military opinion expressed by General Scott was that to hold it would require a force of 20,000 men, which did not exist. Civilian opinion was that to evacuate it would be a disastrous blow to the Union cause and to Lincoln himself, who had used language in his Inaugural Address which had been taken to mean that it would be held at all costs. The responsibility lay on the President, and he could share it with no one. He decided on purely political grounds to wait and see. He waited dangerously long, and then resolved that the



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

From the Statue by A. St.-Gaudens, in Parliament Square, London.

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fort should be provisioned but not reinforced, which practically gave it to the South ; but not until the interval had softened the blow to the North and made its seizure a clear act of aggression on the part of the South. Taking the political and the strategical factors together he was clearly right, but he had acted in the teeth of military opinion.

The same complication of politics and strategy dogged him at every step in the struggle that followed. He had to preserve the unity of the North, which meant on the one hand that the zealots for abolition must not be quenched, and on the other that the doubters and waverers must not be driven into the arms of the Secessionists by premature action which offended their ideas of law and property. He had at the same time to decide between the rival plans of military commanders, and somehow to appease an excited public and Press which called for vigorous and immediate action, while the army had yet to be recruited and trained. The Northerners had sprung to arms, but they were not aware of the difference between zealous recruits and disciplined forces, and being a high-spirited people, expected to be led at once against the enemy. Yielding to their pressure Lincoln seems to have induced the cautious General Scott to withdraw his opposition to a forward movement, and there followed immediately the defeat of Bull Run.

Lincoln from this point seems to have learnt his lesson and he set himself in such intervals as were left him from endless and pettifogging administrative duties to the study of military books. This seems to have led him to the conclusion that the best thing a civilian President could do was to trust the soldiers, and for the next few months he pinned his faith to McClellan, who drilled and trained a splendid army, but was perpetually of opinion that the time to move was not yet. Lincoln tried honestly to give him a free hand, and bore uncomplainingly the rising tide of discontent at the dilatoriness of this commander, but it gradually became plain to him that the responsible civilian could find no safety in trusting even the "Young Napoleon," as McClellan was dubbed by his admirers.

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So in spite of himself we see him drawn back into strategy, and compelled to offer advice and reproof on matters which, according to the rules of the game, were purely professional. His patience finally broke when McClellan let Lee escape after the battle of Antietam, and in November 1862 he removed him from his command. But the same questions almost immediately arose with other generals—Holleck, Buell, McClernand—and little by little he was drawn into advocating his own strategical plans, choosing commanders after his own heart, urging them to action, taking literally and seriously his own responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief of the Union forces. It was not until he found himself in the hands of Grant and Sherman that he felt able to fall back on his civilian duties and leave the conduct of the war to the soldiers.

It is, I think, extremely improbable that if Lincoln had been a Prime Minister in the European sense he would have survived the first two years of the war. Impatience at the unpreparedness of the Government and the ineffective conduct of the war found loud and angry expression ; and he was charged alternately with meddling with the soldiers and with failing to assert his authority. At the same time political zealots were furious at the deep and patient wisdom with which he refused to force the question of Abolition until the military situation was ripe for it. Had his position depended on Cabinet solidarity or a vote in Congress, he would have lived the same precarious life as any European Prime Minister during the first two years of the Great War, and would probably have succumbed to the attacks of that formidable and remorseless journalist, Horace Greeley. There were months even in the year 1864, after the victory of the North was assured, when his re-election as President seemed highly uncertain. There was even talk of setting him aside and compelling Grant to be a candidate. In August 1864, Lincoln was told by Thurlow Tweed, the Republican party-manager, that his election was hopeless, and ten days later he received the same assurance from the Central Republican Committee. This, as it turned out, was a groundless panic, but what

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might have happened if there had been any serious military reverse in the weeks before the election is by no means certain.¹

3

Bismarck was, I suppose, the most powerful Minister of the last hundred years, but he too, man of "blood and iron" as he was, complains incessantly of his difficulties with soldiers. They seem, if we may believe his accounts, to have been peculiarly incapable of digesting the maxim of their countryman, Clausewitz, that war is the continuation of policy. They regarded it as an end in itself, to be pursued for its own sake to its own remorseless conclusion, and greatly resented the intrusions of the Minister President, who, with all his ruthlessness, regarded it as an instrument of policy. The most famous of his conflicts was after the battle of Königgrätz in the Six Weeks' War with Austria in 1866, when the desire of the soldiers for a knock-out blow and a triumphant entry into Vienna threatened to make havoc of his secret plan for another war in which the benevolent neutrality of Austria would be a necessity. It was imperative to check the soldiers, but a frank disclosure being impossible, the difficulties were very great. The final scenes in this encounter are vividly described in his "Reflections and Reminiscences" :

On July 23, under the presidency of the King, a council of war was held, in which the question to be decided was whether we should make peace under the conditions offered or continue the war. A painful malady from which I was suffering made it necessary that the council should be held in my room. On this occasion I was the only civilian in uniform. I declared it to be my conviction that peace must be concluded on the Austrian terms, but remained alone in my opinion ; the King supported the military majority. My nerves could not stand the strain which had been put upon them day and night ; I got up in silence, walked into my adjoining bedchamber and was there overcome by a violent paroxysm of tears. Meanwhile, I heard the council dispersing in the next room. I thereupon set to work to commit to paper the reasons which in my opinion spoke for

¹ "Abraham Lincoln," by Lord Charnwood, p. 411.

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the conclusion of peace ; and begged the King, in the event of his not accepting the advice for which I was responsible, to relieve me of my functions as Minister if the war were continued.

The next day he went armed with this document to see the King, with whom he had a long and agitated interview, which left both of them in a state of prostration :—

The resistance which I was obliged, in accordance with my convictions, to offer to the King's views with regard to following up the military successes, and to his inclination to continue the victorious advance, excited him to such a degree that a prolongation of the discussion became impossible ; and under the impression that my opinion was rejected, I left the room with the idea of begging the King to allow me, in my capacity of officer, to join my regiment.

Then in the nick of time the situation was saved :

I was in the mood that the thought occurred to me whether it would not be better to fall out of the open window, which was four storeys high ; and I did not look round when I heard the door open, although I suspected that the person entering was the Crown Prince, whose room in the same corridor I had just passed. I felt his hand on my shoulder while he said : “ You know that I was against this war. You considered it necessary and the responsibility for it lies on you. If you are now persuaded that our end has been attained. I am ready to support you, and to defend your opinion with my Father's.” He then repaired to the King and came back after a short half-hour in the same calm, friendly mood, but with the words : “ It has been a very difficult business, but my Father has consented.” This consent found expression in a note written with lead-pencil on the margin of one of my last memoranda, something to this effect : “ Inasmuch as my Minister-President has left me in the lurch in the face of the enemy, and here I am not in a position to supply his place, I have discussed the question with my son ; and as he has associated himself with the Minister-President's opinion, I find myself reluctantly compelled, after such brilliant victories on the part of the Army, to bite this sour apple and accept so disgraceful a peace.”

The soldiers, Bismarck reports—not Moltke and Roon but the “ demigods ” as the higher Staff Officers were then

¹ “ Bismarck ; His Reflections and Reminiscences,” English translation, Vol. II, 47-52, *ibid.* p. 107.

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called—were extremely unforgiving, and when the 1870 war came, took steps to exclude him altogether from the military councils, and to make life as uncomfortable as possible for him, when he accompanied the army in the field. At Versailles, during the siege of Paris, he found himself, as the expression goes, “on the mat,” and he solemnly relates that for military information which he considered indispensable to his political duties, he had to have recourse to William Russell, the correspondent of the *Times*.

4

If Bismarck fared thus, what could be expected by the much less heroic figures who acted as civilian Ministers to Germany in the Great War?

We have, as it happens, a narrative of the profoundest interest which shows their plight at the tensest moment of the struggle. This is to be found in the minutes of the evidence given in November 1919 to the German Committee of Inquiry in the War in respect to the launching of the unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. No decision taken by any of the belligerents was more portentous in its results; none raised such terrifying questions of morals and expediency; none in the end so decisively sealed the fate of those who took it.

The circumstances must be recalled. By December 1916 it was the opinion of the High Command that Germany was in grave peril. The attack on Verdun had failed with immense losses; the defence on the Somme had wasted and exhausted the army. She had had a showy success against Rumania, and still maintained an imposing military façade, but Austria was visibly breaking, and Germany herself being worn down by the blockade. It was the opinion of Hindenburg and Ludendorff that her military effort was exhausted, and that if no other way could be found, she must inevitably drift to collapse and defeat. There remained in their opinion but one way—that of the unrestricted submarine. It was taken, and proved the greatest disaster of all, since it extinguished all possible hope of a

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negotiated peace at the end of 1916, and added the United States to the enemies of Germany.

Bethmann-Hollweg, the Chancellor of this period, Helferrich, the Secretary of State for the Interior, and Zimmermann, the Foreign Secretary, were called upon by the Committee of Inquiry to explain why they consented to this decision, in view of the generally known fact that they entertained the gravest doubts as to its wisdom. Their answer was, in effect, that they were powerless against the pressure of the Supreme High Command and the Admiralty on the one side, and of popular opinion on the other. Bethmann-Hollweg, according to his own account, fought his ground all through December, and on the 26th of the month he received the following communication from Hindenburg :—

Since our points of view appear to be markedly divergent, I shall be obliged to announce, in defence of the attitude of the Supreme High Command of the Army, that your Excellency claims, it is true, the final responsibility as Imperial Chancellor, but that I (the Field-Marshal) shall, very naturally, to the extent of my power with the feeling of complete responsibility for the successful outcome of the war, insist that those military measures be taken, which I consider appropriate for that purpose.¹

The critical decision was taken at Army Headquarters at Pless on January 9, 1917. "When I arrived there," says Bethmann-Hollweg, "the decision had already been taken *de facto*. The Supreme High Command and the Admiralty Staff were, for their part, determined to carry on the U-boat war. The Emperor stood behind them."

Bethmann-Hollweg goes back over the course of events which led up to this point. Again and again, he assures the Committee, he had taken up arms against the U-boat agitation to the best of his power, and in the early days he was helped by the evident insufficiency of the number of these boats to do what was claimed for them. But constant agitation, encouraged by the soldiers and abetted by the censorship, produced "that invincible and un-

¹ Official German Documents relating to the World War, Carnegie Endowment Translation, Vol. I, 340 *et seq.*

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limited confidence in the U-boat weapon which was one of the phenomena of the war " :—

The state of hypnosis into which our people were thrown was of itself an offence against them. Whether the U-boat war could have been carried on or whether we were to refrain from doing so, was a question fraught with such mighty consequences that it was not befitting that its solution should in any way be effected by the passions of the people. The contrary, however, was the case. The national conviction constituted an element which, when a Hindenburg announced that the U-boat war was required on the ground of military necessity, could not be ignored without leaving for all eternity, thrust deep into the soul of the people, the thorn of doubt whose sting would tell them that their future had been sacrificed by their cowardice.

Faced with this state of opinion, and with the blunt declaration of the General Staff that they would not be responsible for the conduct of the war if he continued to oppose them, Bethmann-Hollweg represents himself as having sought desperately for " tangible reasons with which to support my view that without a U-boat war it was possible to bring the war to a conclusion in some way that would be acceptable." Various peace moves were on foot. Wilson, on German prompting, had offered his services, and Germany had—rather strangely—anticipated him by a move of her own. But how obtain terms acceptable to Germany, terms which would have been tolerated by either the High Command or the public in their state of intoxicated confidence in the U-boat? What German could trust Wilson or suppose that Lloyd George, who had just supplanted Asquith in England, would forgo the knock-out blow? True, Bethmann-Hollweg had in his pocket dispatches from Bernstorff, the Ambassador in Washington, who warned them plainly that if the U-boat campaign were started, America would come into the war, but this had no terror for the High Command, who were convinced that long before America could appear on the scene, England would be forced to make peace and that, in any case, the U-boats would prevent the transport of Americans to Europe.

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So Bethmann-Hollweg decided that he had no hand to play, and on January 9 he consented to the *de facto* decision of the High Command and the Admiralty and kept Bernstorff's dispatches in his pocket. But not, he tells us, without much mental agonizing. He pictures himself as torn between conflicting responsibilities, the responsibility of opposing and the responsibility of assenting to the U-boat war in view of his own decided opinion that it would be disastrous; and as choosing that which seemed at the time to be the less evil of two evil courses. "The responsibility of having prevented the use of an instrumentality of warfare which was demanded by such pre-eminent authorities for reasons given, and which was looked upon by the great masses of the people at home and in the trenches and by the majority of the chosen representatives of the people as the only, but also certain, method of saving us from destruction—this responsibility was the tremendous and terrible burden, the enormous dead-weight which bore down upon me in those days and hours." Finally Bethmann-Hollweg poses the question whether he should have resigned, and to that he answers "impossible." "Was I to venture to do anything which might interfere with the decisive move that was now no longer to be stopped? Was I to venture to spoil any chance?" So he held on for six months, and in July became the principal scapegoat of the failure of the U-boats.

The conclusion which Bethmann-Hollweg draws is that though a parliamentary government might perhaps have been intrinsically stronger, the actual German Government had no power of standing up against the soldiers. "When Field-Marshal Hindenburg and General Ludendorff were called to the Supreme High Command of the Army, nearly all the civilian population of Germany was convinced of the fact that the question of how the war should be carried on and as to how it should be terminated was one whose decision rested with them alone." "There never was a time when, if I had put the question of the predominance of the views of the political branch to the test, I should

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have been able to obtain a tenable majority." Hence the acceptance of military decisions which were politically disastrous. It is improbable that Bismarck would ever have admitted the necessity under the German system of submitting to the soldiers at the cost of political disaster. His own conduct in 1866, which I have already recalled, is strong presumptive evidence to the contrary, but men of the type whom William II called to high office in the years before the war were almost of necessity at the mercy of the ruling military caste.

Our sympathies with Bethmann-Hollweg in the terrible stress of these events might have been stronger, if there had not been produced in the subsequent cross-examination a telegram of his own sent to Hindenburg and Admiral von Holtzendorff in October 1916, in which he represents his endeavour to persuade Wilson to issue an appeal for peace as a ruse to prepare the way for the U-boat warfare :—

At the personal command of His Majesty, Count Bernstorff has been instructed to approach President Wilson on the subject of issuing an appeal for peace. In case Wilson is prevailed upon to do this, the probable rejection of the appeal by England and her Allies in connexion with our acceptance will constitute good grounds for us to withdraw the promise we have made to the United States, i.e. to keep to restricted submarine warfare, and to do so in a manner morally justifiable to the world at large, particularly justifiable in the eyes of the European neutral Powers, and will thereby have an effect upon the attitude which they will probably assume later on. Count Bernstorff has not yet replied to the proposal, which was immediately communicated to him by telegram. Before the situation is cleared up in this respect, an announcement of the U-boat war, to be followed by steps for the purpose of carrying it into execution, according to the orders of His Majesty is absolutely impossible. And before this is done, I am scarcely in a position to obtain an agreement thereto of our Allies.¹

It may be said on Bethmann-Hollweg's behalf that he was casting about for any means to keep the High Command at bay, but the fact that they had this document in their possession must have fatally undermined him in the remon-

¹ Official German Documents relating to the World War. Carnegie Endowment Translation, p. 363.

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strance that he made at a later date. Moreover the terms of peace which were afterwards submitted to Wilson raise a strong presumption that the real motive was, as this document suggests, to invite rejection. The demand for a new boundary which would "protect Germany and Poland against Russia, strategically and economically"; for "guarantees assuring Germany's safety from Belgium which would have to be reached by negotiations with the Belgian Government" without intervention by the Allies; for "strategic and economic boundaries" and for financial compensation and indemnification as the condition of restoring French territory—all this was totally unrelated to a military situation which the High Command acknowledged to be desperate, and could only be justified by confidence in the supposed infallible weapon of the U-boat. It is difficult to suppose that Bethmann-Hollweg in consenting to these demands was not aware that he was playing straight into the hands of the military and naval parties. The situation was one which, on his own hypothesis, required a clear choice between a negotiated peace on the very moderate terms that the military position permitted, and the pursuance of the war by the submarine to the point at which these "Conqueror's terms" could be enforced. By consenting to the "Conqueror's terms," he necessarily destroyed the effect of his protest against the U-boat war and decreed the failure of the peace negotiations.

The evidence of Helferrich and Zimmermann is on much the same lines, though they draw a distinction between opposition to the U-boat war *per se* and a desire for its postponement for reasons of expediency. Helferrich too, like Bethmann-Hollweg, dismisses the idea of resignation as unthinkable, as in fact a "traitor's act," when the die had been cast, and asserts that he fulfilled an imperative duty in making the best of the naval and military decision. It would be tedious to follow the evidence of these witnesses in detail, but the story needs to be completed by a brief reference to the attitude of the naval witnesses who were called upon to explain their confident prediction as to the results of the U-boat warfare and its falsification by events.

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They protest to the end that they were well justified, that the sinkings actually exceeded their forecasts, and seem to say that by all the rules of the game England ought to have succumbed by the date specified. Why then did she not succumb? For reasons which military and naval people could not have been expected to foresee: the astonishing weakness of neutrals who permitted the commandeering of their tonnage; the development of counter-measures not contemplated by the Navy; but most of all untimely political happenings such as the peace resolution in the Reichstag, July 9, 1917, and Count Czernin's report to the Austrian Emperor, which unfortunately came into the hands of the Allies, and by revealing the weakness of the German and Austrian position put new heart into them, just when their *moral* was breaking. It was always the politicians and never the admirals or generals who were wrong. "The U-boat," says Admiral Koch, "justified all expectations both in efficiency and in results. It was not a scatter-brained undertaking; it was no win-all, lose-all game. If, at the end of the period at which the result was expected to take place, Germany gave her enemies reason to expect that her capacity for resistance was diminishing, then the inference which in my opinion should be drawn is that this instrument of warfare should have been brought into play at an earlier date; for when faced with the ever-increasing methods of defence, the U-boats were no longer in a position to inflict such wounds upon the enemy as to make him wonder whether, after all, he was more capable of continued resistance than Germany." ¹ Once more, then, it was the politicians who prevented the use of this instrument at the date when it would have been efficacious.

Dr. M. J. Bonn, one of the experts who prepared a memorandum for the second Sub-Committee, thus sums up the case in regard to Bethmann-Hollweg:—

I am perfectly clear in my own mind that he was acting very largely under the inspiration of patriotic influences when he stated that his resignation might have been looked upon as indicating that

¹ Official German Documents relating to the World War. Carnegie Endowment Translation, pp. 537, 556 *et seq.*

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he entertained some doubt about the possibility of the success of the U-boat war, and that he did not wish to express his disavowal of the military policy in that critical hour. I am, however, of opinion that this extreme conscientiousness was wasted, as the records themselves indicate. For the military authorities were perfectly ready, as is shown by the protocol of the 8th of January, 1917, to accept the retirement of Bethmann-Hollweg as part of the bargain if he had stuck to his point ; and, on the other hand, if he gave into them, to hold him up to all the world as a champion of their course. But they were, as was made perfectly plain during this conference, perfectly ready to let him fall, or, better still, to force him out, if he failed to meet their wishes.

I very deeply regret the fact that he did not at that time draw the conclusion referred to.¹

Another "expert," Dr. Hoetzsch, adds :

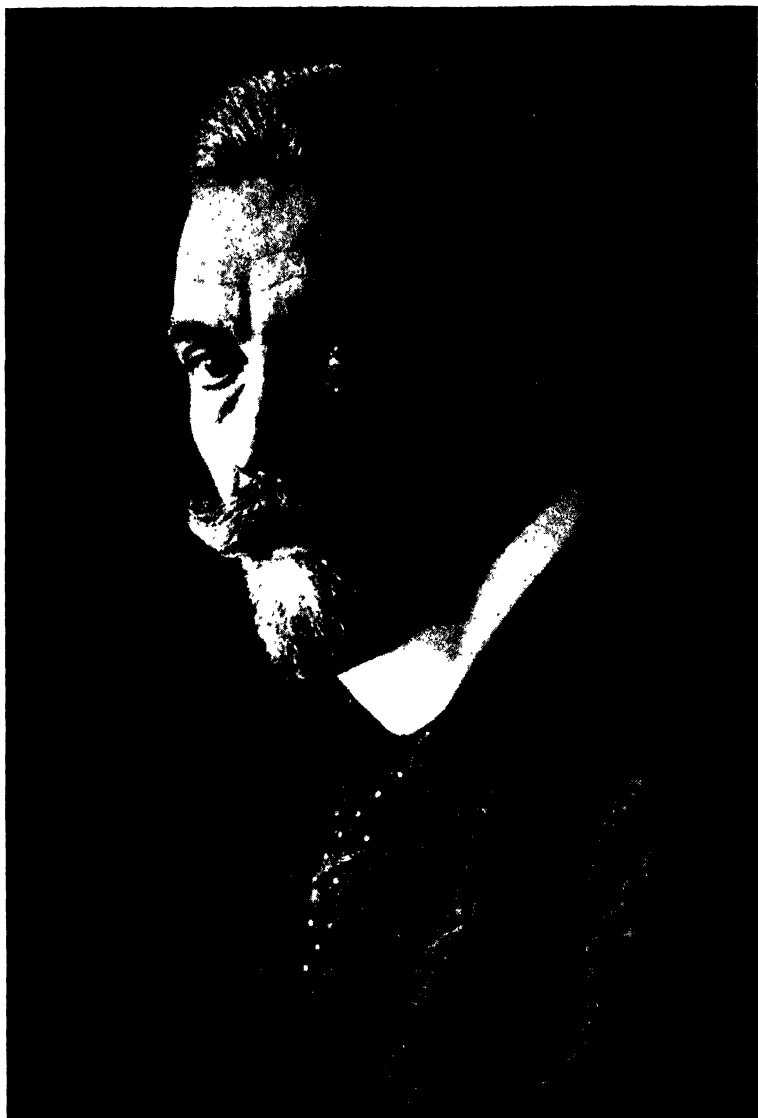
Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg is, in my opinion, one of the most unsullied characters on earth, but he has succeeded in bringing himself, his policies, and the policies of the German Empire into a position of disrepute before the whole world, so that they are looked down upon as standing for that lack of frankness, for equivocation, and double-dealing against which we are obliged to-day to battle to the full extent of our power. We know that it was not a conscious absence of honourable dealing on the part of Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg, but we know that it was his lack of determination, his meekness, and a certain Machiavellism with which he played that led to his over-estimation of his diplomatic capacity.

I conclude that as the result of weakness, the lack of powers of decision, and the incapacity on the part of the political branch, in other words—since the responsibility is placed beyond any question of doubt—on the part of Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, these opportunities for bringing about peace-parleys were not taken advantage of to the full extent afforded, and not to the extent of reaching an unbiased and definite judgment as to the consequences of success or failure.²

Bethmann-Hollweg has passed from the scene, and it is not within my scope to pass judgment on his action, but there is no more poignant example than is contained in this narrative of the struggle between the civilian Minister and the soldiers in command, which is an almost invariable incident of the state of war.

¹ Official German Documents, p. 537.

² *Ibid*, p. 210.



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Having been elicited by a public inquiry, this German narrative is the most intimate and most detailed that we have of these conflicts. But what is known of our own experience suggests the same conclusions. From the beginning to the end of the War, questions of policy and strategy, choices between rival policies and strategies, purely technical questions such as the kind of ammunition to be provided, fell on the civilian members of the Cabinet and involved them in acute controversies with each other, and with different naval and military schools. The soldiers were divided between the merits of shrapnel and high explosives, and the civilians had to decide after a controversy which wasted months of precious time. The soldiers and sailors were divided about the claims of the Western and Eastern fronts, about the Dardanelles Campaign, about the proper way of co-ordinating the Allied armies, about the methods to be adopted against submarines, about the possibility of invasion and the number of men required to be detained in this country to guard against it; and on all these questions civilian Ministers had to form the final opinion, generally after prolonged and exhaustive controversies, and often against formidable and highly authoritative dissent. There are no certainties in war, and the expert even in his own sphere will not take the responsibility of guaranteeing anything.

I have no wish to revive the controversies of this period, but it may be useful, as showing the responsibilities of the civilian Minister in war, to examine one or two of the principal subjects of contention. First, the Dardanelles Campaign. The forcing of the Straits was beyond doubt an imposing and attractive idea. It promised, if successful, to throw the Turks out of the war, to make the Balkans solid against the Central Powers, to open up an entirely new strategy against Austria, to enable Russia to export her grain and to be supplied with munitions—all objects of first-class importance which, if achieved, must have been crushing blows to the enemy. But at each stage there were

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most formidable difficulties, many of which required a political as well as a military judgment. Thus on the proposal to force the Straits by naval operations alone, there arose the question whether, if it was feasible, it would achieve the desired result of compelling the Turks to surrender. On the face of it this operation was in the teeth of the general principle that a sufficient landing force must accompany a fleet to complete its work. It was argued, however, that the Turks were reluctant adherents to the German cause, and that on the appearance of the Allied fleet in the Sea of Marmora they would either surrender at once or be compelled to do so by an internal revolution. Against this it was known that the Turkish Government was a military dictatorship under German control, that the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* were in Constantinople, and would probably apply a strong counter-intimidation to the intimidation of the Allied fleet, if the Turks proposed to surrender. The judgment on this subject was at least as much political as military—an inference from the character of the Turks or from secret intelligence about their internal condition—and it was obviously of first-class importance. For if, after the fleet had succeeded in forcing the Straits, the Turks had resisted and sent an army to seize the Narrows, mine the channel and open the masked batteries on shore, the Sea of Marmora might have been a death-trap for the fleet.

When it came to joint military and naval operations the issues were simpler. It was then in the main the question of whether enough force could be spared from other theatres of war and concentrated on this one to overcome the obstacles. But that too, in the circumstances of the first six months of 1915, raised psychological and political difficulties of the most complicated kind. Men were short, ammunition was short, a very thin line was desperately holding the trenches which alone kept the Germans from the Channel ports. It could not be expected that the French, with their sense of grave and imminent danger, would bend their minds with the same enthusiasm as Mr. Churchill to an adventure at the far end of the Mediterranean, or see with composure the withdrawal of troops on which they had

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relied for the defence of the Western front. Looking back on it, one sees this vastly difficult enterprise, requiring swift, well-timed, highly-concerted action between army and navy, and ally and ally, tossed about between French and British civilians and soldiers, subject to all the claims and cross-currents of another theatre of war, held back or pushed forward according to the moods and tempers of various dominant personalities, and finally wrecked by premature action which gave the enemy full warning of what was coming.

It is now open to all the parties to throw the blame for failure on someone not themselves, but it is perhaps sufficient to say that the combination of happy circumstances needed to make it a success was in the conditions of 1915 humanly impossible. Judged as an isolated enterprise, it may have been, as Mr. Churchill said, a legitimate gamble; and there is nothing to take exception to in that phrase; but judged in relation to the other liabilities of army and navy and the other crushing responsibilities of the Governments, the odds against it were so heavy as to be practically prohibitive.

In the Dardanelles affair we see soldiers, sailors and civilian Ministers taking sides, with or against each other, irrespective of their professions. Soldiers differ from soldiers, sailors from sailors, and Ministers who have to decide are found in both camps. On another question, that of the blockade, this is not so. Here we find the soldiers and sailors sharply divided from the Government. The former want everything kept out, and the protests of all neutrals met with a stiff front. The Government, weighed down with the fear of political consequences, and the danger of adding to the hostile combination against them, counsel prudence and compromise, which the fighting men construe as weakness and timidity. The climax is reached about cotton. The folly of permitting cotton to pass into Germany through neutral ports—even the criminality of it—since it is being used for the manufacture of high explosives which will presently be employed to kill and maim British soldiers on the front! Exclude cotton, say the fighting services, and the war will be brought

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to an end, and Germany forced to submit for the lack of explosives. It was, in a smaller way, not unlike the controversy which raged a little later on the German side between Ministers and soldiers about the intensive submarine. "Exclude cotton," said the Foreign Minister. "Nothing could be more desirable, but have you thought of the consequences of the total embargo you propose? You will set the whole of the Southern States (President Wilson's staunchest supporters) against you, quite possibly invite retaliation by the stopping of munitions from America, and almost certainly rule out American intervention on our side as a possibility of the future. Besides, are you quite sure that you will do any good, and that the ingenious Germans will not find substitutes for cotton?" (as they afterwards did). To which the fighting men replied that war was war, and that if the United States was so unreasonable as to take offence at the exercise of legitimate belligerent rights, they must be exercised nevertheless, and the consequences damned. Undoubtedly in Germany the controversy would have ended in an ultimatum from the fighting services, and the submission of the Foreign Secretary, but in the light of subsequent events it will scarcely be held that Lord Grey served his country ill when he stood out for reasonable consideration of the American point of view on this question.

It was one of the inevitables of the war that Asquith and Lloyd George should be in frequent conflict about its main strategy. The Western and Eastern schools made so obvious an appeal to their respective temperaments that it could not have been otherwise. It required a massive and dogged stoicism to live through the trench warfare on the Western front, and to support generals who at great cost and sacrifice were apparently effecting nothing. To a nimble and resourceful mind unceasingly on the lookout for ways to circumvent and outwit opponents, this method of warfare seemed stupid and brutal. Why waste the flower of British youth in vain attempts to wear down the enemy in the mud of Flanders or hurl it against impenetrable walls, when all the map was open? A thousand times

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better Nivelle's heroic scheme for breaking through on the Craonne plateau, or when that failed, a grand diversion which would send the British army via Laibach to Vienna ! To a man who thought thus, it was not loyalty or virtue but mere lethargy and lack of intelligence which led a Government to give blind support to generals whose every prediction had been falsified by events and whose strategy seemed radically stupid.

Scores of thousands of miserable and anxious parents thought in this way at the end of 1916, and to them Lloyd George seemed to bring salvation. "Wait and See" was at length to be dethroned and brains and strategy given their chance. But the results disappointed everybody, and I suppose Lloyd George most of all. Instead of the promised unity and concentration on new schemes, there began the grimmest struggle between soldiers and politicians, and one school of soldiers and another, that had yet been seen. The principal new scheme miscarried disastrously, and in the change between new and old the Germans escaped from what seemed to be the hopeless entanglement of the Somme. At the moment when we thought our efforts fruitless, the Germans, as I have just shown, were openly confessing to each other that their doom was sealed. When it came to the point, the Eastern diversions proved impossible, for there was no month or week in which it was possible to spare any considerable number of troops without risking a disaster that might have been irreparable, at least after the escape of the Germans from the Somme and the failure of Nivelle on the Craonne plateau.

It will, I suppose, be debated to the end of time whether, if the Asquith Government had remained in office and the Joffre-Haig plan for an offensive in February, 1917, been adhered to, the war might not have been ended as soon as the intensive submarine had been disposed of. The German documents seem to favour that supposition, but the Eastern school will no doubt reply that their idea was never given a chance. That is true ; the same fate overtook it in 1917 as overtook the Dardanelles expedition in 1915, and for the same reason. Risks which seemed light to

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the politicians seemed prohibitive to the soldiers. To the soldiers, or the great majority of them, the West was always the main theatre of war, the great defensive as well as the offensive front, and there was no advantage to be gained elsewhere which could compensate for any serious disaster in the West. Here, when pressed, the soldiers dug themselves in, and stubbornly resisted all efforts and blandishments to induce them to part with troops which they thought necessary for the defence of their positions. On this one issue the great majority of British and French soldiers were united, and together they defeated the politicians, both French and British. For their justification they point to the events of March, 1918, and ask what would have happened then if a large part of the British army had been on the road to Vienna? To decide this issue is beyond my competence, but the history of this year is rich in material for the study of the clash between the political and the military strategists, and we may, I think, deduce from it the limits which are set to civilian counsels in war.

6

In war-time it is dangerous for civilian Ministers to be, in Milton's phrase, "lowly wise." They must not only be wise but seem wise, not only be energetic but seem energetic, or the public will become discouraged and suspicious. The qualities of patience, magnanimity, modesty, reticence, which are held to be virtues in peace-time, are positive handicaps in war. Lights must not be hid under bushels nor silence kept to those that brawl. Lloyd George understood this, and Asquith did not, and the fact may be recorded without criticizing either. The sense of bustle and excitement which emanated from Lloyd George, his voice incessantly raised in warning and expostulation, his appeals for effort and more effort, the co-operation of the newspapers, which he alone seemed able to secure, in spreading his appeals to the farthest corners of the country—all these were valuable elements in kindling the national spirit, and of special value in his original work as Minister

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of Munitions. He seemed, like Kitchener, to be one of the few men who had the right measure of the immensity of the struggle and the national peril, and to know exactly the moments when the public wanted jeremiads, and when it looked for reassurance. These were spectacular qualities, the free exercise of which by one man inevitably threw into the shade and finally eclipsed other men, who, incessantly and usefully as they might be at work behind the scenes, looked weak and indecisive in comparison with him. Asquith, in particular, made the mistake of supposing that the dignified silence which is often the statesman's best answer in times of peace would serve him equally well against incessant and malignant newspaper attacks in time of war. These fell day after day upon a public racked with anxiety and predisposed to blame politicians for what went wrong in war ; and to leave them unanswered was to leave them to sink in until the image created by the newspapers became ineffaceable. We have since seen that Coalition Governments lack the cohesive loyalty which impels men who have done long service together to come to each other's defence in these emergencies, and this also is their defect in war. Political attachments must of course give way to national necessity, but the war-time dissolution of the usual partnerships increases the danger noted by all the historians of war, from Thucydides onwards, that men of quiet judgment and persistence are likely to be thrust to the wall when they are most needed. *C'est Boulanger qu'il nous faut* is a cry which is easily raised in all countries when they are at war.

The credulity of war-time has been abundantly explored by students of crowd psychology, and I need not enlarge on it here. But it needs very seriously to be taken into account by politicians who easily become the victims of legends and hallucinations that would be laughed to scorn in ordinary times. Haldane, who created the Expeditionary Force and the Territorial Army, who was the most capable War Minister of our time, was seriously believed by a multitude of people to be all but a German spy. The legend was built up on an address delivered on an academic occasion long before the war, in which he

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said, or was supposed to have said, that a certain German university at which he had studied philosophy as a young man was his "spiritual home"; and there was no other foundation for it whatever. As a Minister, he had been useful to his colleagues by his knowledge of German, and they had employed him on one or two occasions to place their views before German Ministers and the Kaiser. But as a politician he was a keen upholder of the *Entente* with France, and was even suspected by a section of his party of holding dangerously Chauvinist views. Looking back it seems incredible that such nonsense should have been taken seriously, but it was nevertheless solemnly endorsed by the Conservative leaders who refused to join the 1915 Coalition unless Haldane retired. The result was a grotesque injustice of which most Englishmen in subsequent days have been heartily ashamed, but a hallucination so widespread had the weight of fact, and it had to be acknowledged at the time that Haldane's usefulness as a Minister was grievously impaired by it. Haldane was perhaps the most conspicuous example of the damaging popular myth, but not a few Ministers and leading men in this and other countries were in a lesser degree victims of it.

Briefly to sum up, war is, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, a dangerous and generally a fatal pursuit for the civilian public man. He can find no escape from it by pleading the infirmities of the layman and handing his responsibilities on to his expert advisers. The supposed dividing line between the political and the military is, in practice, non-existent. To the civil Government falls the duty of choosing between different plans of campaign all equally hazardous, and even, it may be, of deciding with what forms of ammunition the army shall be provided. To the Government also belongs the selection of the higher officers, and the duty of withdrawing them, if they should have to be withdrawn. Before a war has lasted a week the Cabinet may find itself up to the neck in strategical problems, and compelled to match its judgment with that of professional soldiers who have made a lifelong study of them, but whose studies have quite possibly brought different schools

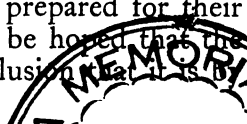
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among them to diametrically opposite conclusions about the question under discussion. As the war progresses the entanglement of the civilian Government with military problems perpetually increases, and unless it can develop the corresponding knowledge and competence, not only will its own existence, but—what is far more important—that of the country, be in peril.

These facts are commonly shirked or smothered in the popular notion that war is an affair of professional soldiers in which it is an impertinence for civilians to intervene. Yet, if we have seriously to contemplate war as a hazard of politics, it is of the highest importance that they should be recognized. To be involved in war is the greatest of all the liabilities of those who follow the public life, and to be able to form a cool judgment upon the military and strategical problems that it raises, the most serviceable of all their qualifications in that emergency.

So far as the story of the Great War has yet been written, we see it in almost all the belligerent countries as a prolonged contention about strategical problems in which civilians and soldiers are inextricably mixed, in which the civilian is bound to express his opinion, and in which he is not infrequently proved by the event to have expressed the sounder view. If disaster has followed when military opinion has been overridden by civilian, disaster has also followed when civilian opinion has been overridden by military. Derided as the amateur strategist may be, the Minister is compelled in war to be a strategist whether he likes it or not.

There is a world of difference between interference with the conduct of troops in the field, which is a purely professional art, and the quality of judgment which is required of the civilian Minister in war. Nothing could be greater folly than the first of these things, but nothing could be more necessary than the second, and so long as wars endure, politicians need to be as much prepared for their part as soldiers for theirs. It can only be hoped that the study of war will lead them to the conclusion that all possible means to be avoided.



CHAPTER XXII

REWARDS AND PENALTIES

The Ancient Way—Impeachment—The Modern Difficulty—Discouragements of the Public Life—Its Compensation—The American Way—Rewards for the Rank and File—The Spoils System—Limitations in Great Britain—The Party-fund Honours System—Its Rules and Conditions—The Account Wound up—An Unsolved Problem—The Spate of Honours.

I

HOW shall we reward and how shall we punish our politicians? The transition to this question from a consideration of the immense stakes they are playing with, and the fearful consequences which may follow from their errors, follies, ignorance or even innocent miscalculations, is not, I think, an unnatural one. The answer to it has puzzled all countries at all periods of history. It is still one of the unsolved problems of modern democracy, and a few observations on it may perhaps be interpolated at this point.

Horace Walpole relates how, after the trial in 1746, when the three Scottish lords had been sentenced to be beheaded, old Balmerino, who seems to have been quite cheerful, gave some practical advice "in the cell at Westminster" to his fellow-sufferer, Kilmarnock, about the proper way to behave on the scaffold. "He showed him how he must lay his head; bid him not wince lest the stroke should cut his skull or his shoulders, and advised him to bite his lips. As they were to return, he begged they might have another bottle together, as they should never meet any more till—and then pointed to his neck."¹ The story lingers in one's memory, for it points to a tradition among those who played the great game of public life in the sterner

¹ To George Montagu, Aug. 5, 1746.

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times when heads were the forfeit. To this day the Tower of London bears bloody witness to the risks run by those who either served or opposed the Kings of England, and history leaves it in doubt whether it was the more hazardous to do the one or the other. For several centuries there was scarcely an English noble family, one or more members of which had not paid on the scaffold for the part he had played in public affairs. Somersets, Oxfords, Aubreys, Mores, Exeters, Montagues, Surreys, Suffolks, Wyatts, Norfolks, Northumberlands are all on this "roll of honour." Their families apparently bore no malice, so long as their estates were not confiscated, therein illustrating Machiavelli's maxim that men more easily forget the deaths of their friends than the loss of their property.

This liability of the politicians lasted till well into the eighteenth century, and so long as the Jacobite peril remained, even the greatest were never quite certain whether they might not end on the scaffold. Even in their ordinary political warfare, it was the practice of parties to threaten each other with impeachment and the loss of heads as a possible if not probable result. If Sir Robert Walpole clung to power when he had far better have quitted it, it was because he had good reason to believe that his fall would be followed by his impeachment. As soon as he resigned, his intimates hurried off to burn their papers, and he himself took a similar precaution. For the next year and more escape from impeachment was his one thought and the object of all his underground machinations, and that he achieved it was thought little less than miraculous.¹ From 1746 onwards the axe fell into desuetude, though it was brought out again in 1824 for the rather ignominious purpose of executing the Cato Street conspirators or mutilating their bodies after they were dead. Impeachment was resorted to in the cases of Warren Hastings and Lord Melville, and remains to this day on the Statute Book, with its extreme penalties for the encouragement of British statesmen. More than once when Radical Governments have been in power Conservative newspapers have been

¹ "Chatham," by Lord Rosebery, pp. 172 and 174.

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heard lamenting the softness of the times which prevents its revival.

The difficulty in modern times is that when you begin to cut off heads there is no knowing where to stop. If the ex-Kaiser is to be hanged, which of his Ministers and generals should be spared? The Greeks when they took to shooting their Ministers found that they had to shoot a whole Cabinet, which, being a thoroughgoing Southern race, they did not hesitate to do. The modern doctrine of collective responsibility may even be said to involve a whole Parliament or at least those members of it who have supported the impeached Government. It is a Parliament's business to keep a Ministry in order, and if a Ministry is guilty, does not Parliament share the guilt? Most modern states have therefore decided that statesmen are sufficiently punished by being dismissed from office; and in extreme cases, revolutionaries do the rest. The risks are commonly thought negligible, but they become alarmingly real when a country has suffered defeat in war. Russia has reminded us that "the Terror" is not an obsolete weapon of eighteenth-century Frenchmen; and in all the defeated countries the monarchs have lost their thrones even when they have saved their lives. Even where revolution has been avoided, eminent men have either been assassinated or compelled to seek safety in the strictest seclusion.

Those who thirst for the blood of public men must be content with this. Whether it is the softness of the times or a sign of advancing civilization, modern men are not likely to do their best for their countries with a halter round their necks or a headsman in waiting to correct their errors. The errors which Governments commit cannot be reduced to the measure of common criminality. They may in their results be infinitely more disastrous, but they are not commonly the outcome of personal wrongdoing; and if criminal accountability were the rule, the soberer kind of men would avoid both the risk and the responsibility. There are in any case enough discouragements to men of sensitive disposition. The public man needs the triple brass which is proof against mortification and dis-

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appointment, criticism and invective, wounds to vanity and self-esteem, if he is to live with any comfort through a long career. If his triumphs are great, his disasters are in the same scale, and the same enormous publicity attends his downfall as his exaltation. His struggle to win power is generally long and arduous, and his enjoyment of it brief and precarious ; and not seldom he has to depart from the scene when his fortunes are at their lowest. Disraeli died when everything for which he stood seemed to be in ruins, and Gladstone when the cause to which he had devoted the last twelve years of his life had to all appearances been finally shattered. I have heard a Prime Minister argue that public men are never really in favour with the public except for a short period before they are returned to power. When that summit is gained, the reaction sets in and the Minister almost immediately finds himself battling with hostile currents which will finally submerge him. Hence the paradoxical conclusion that Governments hardly ever, and Oppositions almost always, represent the majority in the country, and that a Minister is never so little in favour as when he is in power.

We need not endorse so pessimistic a view, but those who fear that the penalties for greatness are inadequate may, I think, be reassured. A man of normal domestic instincts can scarcely read the biography of a statesman without wondering how human beings can be induced to lead such a life. The fatigue of it, the wearisome publicity, the unceasing controversy, the stumping and electioneering alternating with the battles in Parliament ; the perpetual banishment from their firesides ; the heavy penalties for slight mistakes ; the inevitable compromises and equivocations ; the incessant friction with their own friends before they can get even a part of their own way ; and then the constant misrepresentation and invective, and the prevailing assumption in the newspapers that they have none of the ordinary feelings which might be expected to resent intrusions on their privacy or reflections on their characters—how can men be found to tolerate these things ? Yet Bacon says acutely that when the great complain of the lives

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they lead, they do so "to abate the edge of envy." And here is finally the clue to the mystery. With all its liabilities the public life is still the most envied of the careers. It offers the most glittering prizes ; it alone carries with it the possibility of what the ordinary mind conceives of as "Greatness"—that combination of power and fame, which is beyond anything that the artist or the man of letters or the most eminent of those who pursue science and the professions can hope to achieve.

2

It is above all things to be desired that the public life shall keep this position of pre-eminence. But whether the conditions will be such as to attract not merely men of great ability but men of high character and delicacy of feeling is one of the most anxious questions for modern democracy. There were periods in the history of the United States during the last century, when the conditions had become so forbidding that men of high character would not face them, and politics were in serious danger of becoming the sport of bosses and their satellites who, as the saying was, were "not in it for their health." A new country with an enormous margin for error and little in contact with the outside world may afford the luxury of bad politics and make up for it by innumerable other activities. But the United States itself has found that it must suffer grievously if it cannot be sure of obtaining men of the highest integrity for its great offices ; and it has very wisely availed itself of its exceptional Constitution to correct the deficiencies of its machine politics. With all the defects which Europeans may find in the American Constitution, the freedom of choice which enables a President to take for his advisers men of distinction in any walk of life, and which enables them to reach the highest offices without going through the mill of politics, is an invaluable corrective. Some equivalent will, I think, have to be found in other democratic states, if the public life is to be guarded against the corruptions of machine-politics, and kept open to the various

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kinds of men who are needed to make Government honest and efficient. Our danger is that the mere pace of politics, let alone its conditions, may be prohibitive to the administrative kind of man who has no platform abilities, and thus leave the whole field to the orators and star-performers who may be quite without administrative capacity, and even have learnt arts which are fatal to good administration.

Nothing, as things are, is commoner than to hear men of forty and upwards say that no consideration would induce them to launch themselves on this sea of troubles. What repels them is not merely a preference for the quiet life, but the tumbling confusion of the public arena. No one, they conclude, could understand the conditions or expect to succeed in them, unless he had been steeped in them and inured to them from his youth upwards. It may be that a larger number of the quieter sort of men will be attracted by a system of voting, such as proportional representation, which would soften their contact with the electors and disentangle political issues, but they are very likely to stand aloof if the conditions cannot be made somewhat less exacting. So long as parties are unable to offer them what may even approximately be called "safe seats," and so long as constituencies turn service into drudgery, these men will look the other way. If parties choose, they could do a good deal by mutual accommodation to ease this situation without any betrayal of their trusts; and if they could also be brought to realize that it is a common interest of them all, which is quite compatible with the firmest maintenance of their convictions, not to make the public life too difficult or too disagreeable, they would do even more to widen the field of choice. The trouble about the public life at the present moment is not that its conditions are too easy, or its penalties and liabilities too light, but that it tends constantly to be more forbidding and exacting to the average normal man.

The rewards and penalties spoken of hitherto touch only the minorities which may reasonably aspire to the higher places. What is to be done for the remainder, the large number of rank and file people, the men of moderate

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ability, whose services are necessary if parties are to do their work and the political machine be kept running? Even to ask the question may seem a little scandalous. Do we not habitually assume that public service is its own reward, is not this country famous in all the world for the great quantity of laborious and efficient work which its citizens contribute for the mere love of it or for no reward more tangible than the approval of their fellow citizens? Undoubtedly it is so, and yet no one can have seen political parties from the inside without being aware that the rewarding of political service is a constant perplexity to them and, if truth be told, the seamiest and most distasteful part of their operations. What is true of this country, which still retains many of the forms of an aristocratic system and its methods of rewards, is still truer of the completely democratic countries which, being cut off from the bestowal of title and rank, are driven to other expedients more in conformity with their principles, but not always more reputable.

America and to some extent France solve the problem frankly by the spoils system, which leaves the bestowal of large numbers of offices in what other countries regard as the permanent Civil Service to the winning parties after the State or Federal elections. Americans are generally agreed that this has not worked well, and practically the whole movement for administrative reform in recent years has been concentrated on efforts to reclaim the Civil Service from politics. It is all but impossible to get continuous and efficient service out of officials who go in and out of office with their parties, and hard necessity, as well as virtue, is on the side of continuity in the more important offices. But American parties are extremely tenacious of patronage, and the spoils system still covers an immense field of minor offices which in other countries are permanent. Here is where the ward politician looks for his reward and finds the steady inducement which keeps him at work for the machine or the boss. I have heard Americans argue that this is a necessary evil, since politics are so complicated and elections so numerous that they can only

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be worked by machines, which must be lubricated by these inducements. This is only to say that money is found in an indirect way to remunerate men who do a necessary work for the public, and, if so, it would seem better to pay them openly than to endanger the public services by appointing them to positions for which they may be quite unfitted.

But if the system still has apologists, it is long since any serious defence was set up for it, and it is more likely to be extinguished in America than copied elsewhere. What strikes one mainly on looking into the facts is the extreme poverty and precariousness of the rewards which keep the American machine running. Salaries in the public service in America are generally on a lower level than the corresponding salaries in this country, and at a surprisingly low level compared with business or professional incomes in America itself. One would have thought that men must be at a very low ebb before they could regard as an inducement the brief tenure of the ill-paid appointments which are supposed to be a sufficient reward for most American politicians. Unless there are ways of adding to these emoluments, the game would not seem to be worth the candle. But the system works in a vicious circle, which is bad for all concerned. The public will not vote more money to be dispensed by the politicians, and with the money voted it is impossible to attract men of good ability and high character. In such circumstances politics and administration fall into the same discredit, and if the judiciary is involved, the consequences may be even more serious.

3

It would be hypocrisy to say that there is no spoils system in British politics, but it is limited and railed off from the permanent Civil Service which covers immensely the greater part of the field. Nor, except in very special circumstances which have always to be justified, are the great Imperial offices affected by a change of Government. An Indian Viceroy who was plainly out of sympathy with

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a new Secretary of State might be asked to resign, if he had not voluntarily retired, but the great mass of officials continue as before. It is only when offices fall in that the British parties have held themselves free to reward their friends, and even in these cases partisan appointments are liable to searching criticism, if the men appointed are not plainly competent to take up the duties assigned to them. Within these limits it has been an agreed maxim that the British parties shall give their friends the first choice. If the Viceroyalty of India or the High Commissionership of South Africa falls vacant when a Liberal Government is in office, the presumption is that a Liberal will be appointed, and similarly that a Conservative will be appointed if a Conservative Government is in office. Again, though the judiciary, when appointed, is entirely independent of and cut off from politics, the political law officers are supposed to have claims to certain high judicial offices, and most Governments tend to give a slight preference to their own partisans in other appointments to the bench, though they have to be extremely careful to make the bulk of their appointments un-partisan. In this way there is a modified spoils system which attracts clever lawyers to the service of parties ; and there is always a hope that a sufficient number of other appointments will fall in to enable a Government to reward the more distinguished of its followers.

But this, as parties have found, is not sufficient to satisfy the bulk of their supporters or, what is equally important, to keep their war-chests replenished. To speak above a whisper about party funds is thought barely polite in British political circles, yet it must be known to everybody that the work thrown on political parties, imperative work if the electoral system is to function properly, entails the expenditure of very large sums of money which must be found from somewhere and have plainly till now not been found by ordinary appeals for funds. The older British parties have generally obtained this money from wealthy supporters and rewarded them with "honours," i.e. with knighthoods, baronetcies and peerages in an ascending scale according to their contributions.

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The chief drawback to this method was that it could not be openly acknowledged. Both in courtesy to the Sovereign and in deference to the general feeling, the fiction had to be maintained that the honour was the reward of some public service performed in a higher and rarer atmosphere than assistance to a party or a transaction in its counting-house. The endower of a hospital or a university or a picture-gallery might be raised to the peerage amid general applause, but the announcement that a man had been made a peer for contributing £50,000 to the funds of his party would probably have been hailed with laughter and shocked surprise. There was in the public mind something furtive and suspicious about a contribution to a party fund. It was a secret fund, an unaudited fund, a fund of the existence of which the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition was officially unaware, and of the details of which, and the names of its subscribers and the amounts of their contributions, he was as a rule actually ignorant. This may not be generally believed, but there was in fact no more rigid etiquette among Chief Whips of the old school than that the Prime Minister should "know nothing" about these things. Further, it was thought to be a cardinal point of party strategy that parties should keep each other in ignorance of their resources, lest either should seek to catch the other napping, and force a dissolution when its funds were low. Finally, the House of Lords itself had to be considered, and that august assembly might have felt hurt in its dignity if the fact had been plainly revealed that it was being regularly recruited by wealthy partisans whose eligibility was measured by their contributions to their parties.

For these reasons it has been impossible to claim boldly that subscriptions to a party fund are as honourable and as worthy of being requited with these honours as any other form of munificence, and instead the fiction has had to be maintained that the persons promoted for this reason have been selected for other and sometimes quite imaginary qualifications. The pretence and the secrecy were equally demoralizing, and when finally it leaked out that there was

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something like a traffic in these decorations, and that intermediaries were at work who were even suspected of taking commissions, the whole thing broke down in public scandal. That it lasted so long was due to two causes : first, that since both parties were implicated neither could afford to denounce the other ; and second, that whips of the old school were guided by a tradition which kept it within bounds. The contribution to the party fund was no doubt a consideration in choosing among many claimants, but the men ennobled came up to a standard which made their ennoblement not absurd or scandalous. When the number of men who qualified became exhausted, and when other whips came on the scene who had forgotten the old traditions and were not scrupulous about keeping within the boundaries, the system was doomed. In the end the Coalitions brought it down. It was just possible to keep it going without scandal when the parties had their turns successively ; but when both were in power together, and both were drawing simultaneously upon the same fountain of honour, the discredit and the scandal became too flagrant.

4

Yet so long as it was worked with discretion, the system had certain advantages. The parties got their money without giving any *political* equivalent. It was a rigid part of the old etiquette that the donor should make no conditions, and when he had received his honour, the transaction was wound up. No Chief Whip would have ventured to report to a Prime Minister or Opposition leader that a wealthy man made a subscription conditional on the party's doing certain things or refraining from doing them. The one transaction of that kind alleged in my memory was that of Cecil Rhodes's donation to the National Liberal Federation in 1891, which his friends afterwards alleged had been given on the strength of an assurance that Gladstone would not evacuate Egypt if he returned to power in 1892. A weekly paper casting about for explanations of the fiasco of the Jameson Raid Committee even suggested that Sir

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William Harcourt and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had been prevented from pressing matters against Rhodes by their knowledge that he was in a position to make very awkward disclosures on this matter. But both Harcourt and Campbell-Bannerman were entirely unaware that any such donation had been given, and investigation proved that no whip or Minister had had anything at all to do with it. The money went not to what is technically known as the "Party Fund," but to the National Liberal Federation, an independent organization detached from the whips. Schnadhorst, who received it, appears to have reassured Rhodes by expressing his own personal opinion that Gladstone would not evacuate Egypt if he was returned to power, but there was plainly not the smallest ground for thinking that Gladstone even knew of the transaction let alone that he sold Liberal policy in Egypt to Rhodes for £10,000. Anyone who had approached Gladstone with the offer of a donation to the party fund with a political condition attached to it would, I think, have had cause to remember the occasion for the rest of his life.

Thus the first rule of the party-fund honour system was that the donation should be unconditional, and the second that the account should be considered closed when the honours list appeared. An ennobled donor who complained that his money was being misapplied or that it had been given under a misapprehension would have been sharply reminded that having got his peerage he had exhausted his right to speak. There was, for example, a strong tendency for Liberal peers to become Liberal Unionists or Conservatives soon after they had entered the House of Lords, but none of them would have ventured to complain because the money they had left behind them was being used for Radical propaganda. So long as it was played under these rules, the game was simply that of exploiting the human weakness for titles, and it kept the *political* influence of money at a minimum. It might be trivial and foolish, but it could not be called corrupt. The surprising thing is, perhaps, that the House of Lords, which was the one party with a right to complain, should

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have been so indulgent about it. But that House had very little of the corporate feeling which might have enabled it to take a stand against a practice which was so convenient to both the older parties ; and, so long as a reasonable standard was exacted from the ennobled donor, this method enabled the aristocracy to absorb the men of wealth in a convenient and automatic way.

5

All this must be borne in mind, if we are to understand why a system which was on the face of it open to so many objections, and which always had the great disadvantage that it could not be openly avowed, was for so long the regular practice of British parties. If it goes, there is still the problem of finding an alternative to it. The practice common in other countries of drawing support for political parties from great industrial and financial interests, which exact a political return for their contributions, and even perhaps paralyse two opposing parties by subsidizing both, is infinitely more demoralizing. It has been one of our great advantages as a free-trade country that we have avoided the corruption of tariff politics, but the comparative ease with which even in this country political parties obtain money when the fiscal question enters on one of its periodic acute phases, is a warning which can scarcely be disregarded. We shall be no better but a great deal worse off, if instead of having to induce rich individuals to contribute for the sake of honours, parties are in a position to draw large funds from industries with an interest in free trade or a tariff. The only approach to that condition in recent years has been the relation of the Conservative party to the brewing interest, which rightly or wrongly is supposed to have contributed largely to its support. The truth about that is not easy to ascertain, but it has more than once been a subject of serious complaint from Conservatives interested in temperance reform.

It may be that the Labour party will get a new and salutary example by showing how a zealous and active

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party may be financed by "the people's pence." The older parties have been, like established churches, so secure in the endowments provided by a few wealthy persons, that their congregations have put but little into the bag. Herein they lose not a little in their propaganda, for nothing is more educational than a well-organized campaign to collect funds, with a stirring appeal to make sacrifices for the cause. But the Labour party has the great initial advantage of the trade union levy, and it is altogether doubtful whether it could raise sufficient money by purely voluntary effort. The financing of politics in fact remains among the unsolved problems of democracy, and it is still conceivable that a system which would enable parties polling more than a certain minimum of votes to recover a large part of their expenses from public funds will have to be accepted as the least of evils, and the safest way of eliminating corrupt influences. As I write it is announced that the Liberal party is about to make a bold attempt to raise a great party fund by public appeal. This promises to be one of the most important political experiments of these times.

The connexion between "honours" and party finance is a peculiarity of British politics and touches only the few rich men who are thus rewarded. There remains the average case of men and women who look for some prize to reward public or political work, or to serve as a badge of professional distinction. The demand appears to be universal, and even the austere Labour member does not disdain to be made a Privy Councillor. But this, too, is easily reduced to absurdity by its excess, and when the fountain of honour flowed in spate over the land during the last years of the war and the first years of the peace, this point was nearly reached. A certain instinct judged it to be unseemly that decorations should descend in an unceasing stream upon those who worked in security at home while scores of thousands were going undecorated to their graves; the contrast between the grim scene at the fighting front and what came more and more to seem like a vulgar scramble for "recognition" at home, produced in the

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end a painful impression. Human nature may require these concessions, but there is no question that they may be a very real debasement of the standards of judgment and an active encouragement to a trivial kind of snobbery. In some countries the distribution of decorations has even been raised to a fine art as a means of checking independent opinions or methods of behaviour which the Government may think inconvenient. Where social eligibility is measured by promotion in the grades of an order dispensed by the Government, the great majority will be constantly on their guard not to displease authority. That was in fact the quite open secret of the German Rat system.

The honours system is no doubt better than the spoils system, and, if a choice must be made between the two, we had better give our vote to the former. But Governments professing democratic principles must always be embarrassed when they deliberately increase the class distinctions which they profess to regard as an evil ; and no one who regards greater equality as a serious part of political faith can feel at all happy at the perpetual creation of new inequalities.

The problem has not been solved either in Europe or America, but human nature will not be given a fair trial until a perfectly honest Government appears on the scene which is strong enough to prevent corruption, and will boldly try the experiment of dispensing with all honours and decorations except as badges of professional promotion in the permanent public service. This would be an act of faith,¹ but it might conceivably be discovered that the idea of service without reward had a positive attraction for the kind of men most needed in public life.

¹ The Labour Government came near this ideal, and no part of its practice was more generally welcomed.

BOOK VI

THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC LIFE

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OLD JOURNALISM AND THE NEW

Statesmen and Newspapers—The Older Politicians and the Press—Gladstone's Attitude—The Inferior Branch of the Profession—An Inevitable Change—The Old and the New Newspaper—The Influence of the Advertiser—Politics and Conscience—What the Public wants—The Brighteners—The Influence of Sport—Relativity of "Brightness"—Effects on the Reader—Effects on the Public Life.

I

IT is impossible to write a chapter upon any aspect of the public life without at some point having to consider the activities of the newspapers. They are the ever-present chorus to the drama and often follow the Greek model in projecting themselves to the forefront of the stage. Their influence on the forms and methods of the public life and on the states of opinion which determine and limit its activities are so far-reaching and penetrating that a separate consideration of their place in the general scheme is a necessary part of these studies.

The idea that the older statesmen had no relations with the Press is, as I have already shown, without serious foundation. Palmerston habitually primed any paper that would do his bidding and keep him advertised. Delane of the *Times* was in intimate correspondence with Ministers, whips and leaders of Opposition, all of whom took immense pains to keep him informed, perhaps with a faint hope of securing a smile from "The Thunderer." It was Lord Aberdeen, whose "verbal communications" enabled him to make his famous "scoop" about the repeal of the Corn Laws, and his biographer says that scarcely a day passed at this time without a meeting between the Minister and the editor. Disraeli was another frequent correspondent

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and conveyed to him the list of the Derby Cabinet in 1852. Even the views of the Queen were passed on to him by a faithful intermediary at Court. But at this period the great and eminent drew a sharp line between the *Times* and other newspapers. It was accepted by Governments as the official organ, and yet was able to give itself the airs of a more durable authority than any Administration. Ministers came and went, but the editor of the *Times* went on, judging them all with serene impartiality, receiving favours but never returning them. The strength of Delane's position was that he had not an ounce of propaganda in his composition. His business, as he saw it, was to serve the *Times*, to keep the Government up to the mark, and to give the public the news. He never strayed outside his province or permitted a public man to encroach on his. Every Government of whatever party was to be given a chance ; none was to escape when it was obviously vulnerable. Having an extremely clear head, and being neither a zealot for popular causes nor a partisan of failing ones, this remarkable man gained an Olympian prestige which distinguished him from all other editors, and enabled the great to cultivate a discreet relation with him which they would have thought impossible or demeaning with the lesser deities.

If the *Times* was in that respect a favoured organ, other newspapers kept in close touch with their own partisans. The *Morning Star* was edited by John Lucas, who was brother-in-law to John Bright, and consulted him as to the policy of the paper on important questions. Disraeli flattered Bright by telling him that he read the *Star* more than any other paper and thought it the best paper published.¹ In later days Frederick Greenwood was in intimate relations with the Conservative leaders and incited Disraeli to the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. John Morley's partnership with Chamberlain and their joint use of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in attacking W. E. Forster for his policy of coercion in Ireland and later in running the unauthorized programme against the Whigs

¹ Trevelyan's "Life," p. 290.

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of the 1880 Cabinet was very nearly a press-and-politician alliance of the modern type, though conducted in a grand style which gave it an air of statesmanship lacking in the later transactions.

Gladstone, too, was by no means indifferent to the Press and took considerable pains to keep it informed and to correct its errors. I remember vividly when, as a young man, I was left in charge of the *Pall Mall Gazette* during the absence of its editor, my feelings of awe at receiving communications from him in his own hand. Several times in the course of a month these came unsolicited, and their form was always slightly menacing. "Mr. Gladstone would like the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to know, etc. etc." He was a most formidable reader of a newspaper and could not abide even slight inaccuracies in a paper that he read regularly. But his intervention was strictly for information and correction ; and I have never known or heard of his suggesting a line of policy to an editor or objecting to a criticism. He treated journalists always with extreme courtesy, and more than once as a young man I have been flattered by the fullness and freedom of his talk about great affairs, but this was the kindness of an illustrious old man to an unknown young one, not the communication of the statesman to the journalist. He held strict notions of Cabinet secrecy, and nothing incensed him more than to have his attention called to articles or paragraphs in newspapers which seemed on internal evidence to have been conveyed from the Cabinet.

Certain of his colleagues in the 1880 Cabinet who came under suspicion of being carriers of this kind of intelligence incurred a displeasure which they never lived down. He had a code of his own about disclosures which were permissible and disclosures which were not. If he wrote a letter with no mark on it, the recipient of it might presume that it was intended for publication. If it was marked "private" it might be shown to anyone but not published ; if it was marked "confidential" it might be shown to colleagues and not withheld from wives ; if it was marked "secret," it was not to be shown to wives, or, without the

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writer's consent, to anybody. If a colleague departed from this code, he was promptly dubbed "not fit to be a Secretary of State," though there were apparently humbler offices which he was deemed competent to fill.

In those days no one seriously doubted that journalism was the inferior branch of the political profession, and journalists themselves were content that it should be so. Who were they—plying by night their anonymous pens, and not even names to the public—that they should aspire to the glittering prizes of the public life, or give themselves the airs of the great, wise and eminent who ruled the Empire?

2

Perhaps the wonder is, as we look back on this period, that it lasted so long, and that the proprietors of the great newspapers—let alone the editors and writers—were so slow in discovering the possibilities of the power that lay in their hands. There was something artificial in this unquestioning acceptance of the subordinate rôle, and still more of the conventions which the politicians had imposed on the newspapers. So much solemnity, such scrupulous regard for the etiquette of the business took the life out of the journalist and swamped the newspapers with respectable dullness. A change was inevitable, but on the face of it there seemed to be no reason why the people who wanted a new kind of newspaper should not have what they wanted, and the people who wanted a different kind continue to have what they preferred. There are many kinds of books, and serious literature has not been driven out of the field by popular fiction. Why, then, should it be otherwise with newspapers?

The answer is that the newspaper lives on the advertiser, and that he who advertises follows the largest circulation. Soon after the appearance of the *Daily Mail*, at the beginning of the 'nineties, it became evident to the proprietors of what were now called the "heavy dailies" that they must either go out into the larger field and make the necessary concessions to popularity or see a large part of their revenue

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melt like snow. There followed a period of great agitation, in which some put up a stubborn fight and went down with flag flying, and nearly all were changed. It was found at the end that there was room at most for about three London papers of the old type, and the position of these was an anxious one, unless they could rely on the support of a faithful clientele of "small advertisers," who were content with the results that they obtained regardless of circulation.

Simultaneously with these changes the newspapers fell upon a time of troubled politics which unsettled their readers and greatly perplexed their editors. Up to 1885 all had been plain sailing for the principal party organs. They followed their leaders and their readers went with them. But Home Rule transferred blocks of Liberal readers to Unionist newspapers and detached advertisers in the same proportion. At the same time conscientious objections afflicted the staffs and threw some of the ablest political writers out of action. A little later the practice of capturing newspapers and transferring them bodily from one side to another or from one group to another set in, and wealthy men sometimes in league with eminent politicians took a hand in this game. Newspapers were bought and sold often at prices out of all proportion to their commercial value, and their staffs were included in the purchase or sale without their leave being asked by seller or buyer. Sir Edward Cook found his paper sold behind his back in 1892, when he was editing the *Pall Mall Gazette* and again in 1900, when he was editing the *Daily News*. The *Daily Chronicle* passed from the Pro-Boers to the Liberal Imperialists, unshipping Mr. Massingham on the way. The morning *Standard* is supposed to have perished from a gallant adhesion to Free Trade, when its party was streaming after the Tariff Reformers. In some of these changes proprietors differed as conscientiously from editors as editors from proprietors, and neither party can be held to blame, if they fell out; but the net result was a further discouragement to serious journalists, who found themselves with an extremely precarious tenure and no secure

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retreat if they resigned or were ejected from their posts.

The popular journals which swam with the stream and regarded themselves and their staffs as pursuing a branch of commerce were immune from these troubles, and so far as the world knew, all was harmony between their editors and their proprietors. The latter were ruthless in squeezing out the angular and the incompetent, but they offered secure employment at handsome salaries to the journalists who fell in with their ways and had a good understanding of what the public wanted. Mistakes were occasionally made in discovering what this might be, but they were never beyond repair by the quick-witted practitioners of the new craft. The intellectual vanity and egotistical regard for their own opinions, which the old journalists called consistency, gave place in these circles to a cheerful and modest attempt to please the great public in its varying moods, and to give liveliness and variety to its thoughts. To keep it amused and not to add the intellectual fatigue of too much thinking to the heavy labours of the day seemed not only wise and profitable but humane and kind. Everywhere the word "bright" was heard. To "brighten" the news, to have "brighter" features, to engage "brighter" writers were the instructions daily repeated, which descended from proprietor to editor, from editor to news-editor, from news-editor to reporters and so on down the chain which ended in the bill-poster and the street-seller. Every afternoon about four o'clock large numbers of "bright" men assembled in newspaper offices to devise games, "stunts" and features for the entertainment of the millions of children of both sexes who would only produce their pennies or their halfpennies, if the programme was to their liking.

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Early in the day it was decided that the children wanted above all things sport, especially horse-racing and betting, and, after that, the kinds of football to which a large number of them were transferring their patronage. To

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discover and keep ahead of the changes of fashion among the children and to provide them with exactly what they wanted was a matter of unceasing anxiety to the brighteners. One enterprising journal leapt ahead of its rivals with the discovery that what they wanted was not merely the result of a horse-race but the starting prices of the winning animals. So it held back for the minute or so needed to enable it to produce both items simultaneously, while its rivals went out with the winner alone. I remember well the mystification which followed. For months its rivals failed to discover what was happening. Day by day they were obviously beating it with the results, and yet the sales were steadily slipping away from them to it. The best brains, as Lord Birkenhead would say, were put on to the problem but failed to solve it until the loss was irretrievable and the new-comer had established itself as "the best paper for sport." Mysterious things of this kind were always happening in the unexplored world of popular fancy, and they kept large numbers of business men in a constant state of strain and anxiety. It was Lord Northcliffe's special gift that he always seemed to know about these things when others were guessing. Nature had made him as sensitive as a seismometer, not only to the earthquakes of the popular mind but to all the premonitory symptoms—the little mutterings and tremblings, the disturbances far out at sea, the sounds inaudible to normal ears—which told that something was coming.

In my early days I shared a room in the office of the first London newspaper for which I worked with a famous sporting tipster, and a very kindly and interesting man he was. I was in perpetual trouble with the proprietor-editor who had a very mean opinion of my abilities in the non-sporting work on which I was engaged. When I had written my daily portion, I sent it down by an office-boy to be edited by him, and presently a bell would ring to summon me into his presence. He was nearly always in a state of speechless anger at my performances, and sometimes he would hold my article between the tips of his fingers over the waste-paper basket and, as I advanced into the room, tear it into little fragments, exclaiming as he did so, "Call

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that a leading article ! Call that a leading article ! ” These interviews were depressing to my spirits, and when I returned to the upper room the famous tipster used to administer consolation and advice, which I remember gratefully to this day. The burden of it was to drop my department, and come over to his. The future, he used to say, was for him and his, and not for me and mine, even if the editor-proprietor was wrong in thinking me unqualified for “ heavy ” journalism—about which he expressed no opinion.

That was somewhere about the year 1886, and it is no disrespect to my old friend to say that he predicted the future of journalism with even greater accuracy than he spotted the winners, famous as he was at that accomplishment. My own difficulty was that I was even more unqualified for his department than I was for the one I had chosen ; but the future has undoubtedly been with his department and others akin to it in all that constitutes “ success ” in a modern newspaper. The Press in the intervening years has become a most efficient organizer of popular entertainment of all kinds and especially of games and the gambling that goes with them. The devices it has brought into its service for the single purpose of enabling the result of a horse-race to be known in all parts of the country within two minutes of its being declared on the course (and all over the Empire within ten minutes more) are a miracle of scientific ingenuity. There could be no more praiseworthy adaptation of intricate applied science. But these things are very costly, and they require not only an immense capital but a corresponding diversion of brains and talent to the entertainment departments of the newspapers, a diversion which must be at the expense of their pretension to be the guides and philosophers of their readers in serious affairs.

The two things will in fact not go together. “ Brightness ” also is subject to the law of relativity. What is “ brightness ” to the readers of the largest circulations is as often as not dreariness and boredom to the readers of serious journals. Nothing, in recent years, has been more futile

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than the attempt to "brighten" the serious papers in the manner found lucrative to the big circulations. The old readers protest that they are not amused, and new ones are choked off by the "heavy articles" retained for the serious reader. There follows a struggle in which one side or the other goes under after a painful conflict of divided views in which both are discredited. The solemn newspaper trying to be sprightly presents the same sort of appearance to the public as a bishop at a fancy dress ball or an elderly lady trying to look twenty. The first rule in journalism is that you must be clear what public you are aiming at, and pursue it with an undivided mind. The new newspapers have damaged the old not only by taking readers from them, but by unsettling their minds and confusing their ideas about their own publics. The "high-brow" newspapers should certainly not have stood still, but they should have developed along their own lines instead of borrowing features from the largest circulations. A few London papers and certain of the great provincial dailies have admirably succeeded in doing this.

4

The moralist may pursue the theme with comment on the state of mind and taste revealed in the English people and those who exploited them at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The exploiters say that they provided a vast deal of innocent amusement and instruction for a public starved by their predecessors, and that in giving them what they wanted instead of what solemn Puritans thought they ought to have they relieved the tedium and fatigue of the common life. Their critics say that they debased the public taste and filled the minds of their readers with crime, sport, gambling, adultery and every sort of vulgarity. Certainly they seemed to assume that the common mind was incapable of consecutive ideas and inordinately concerned about the doings of actors, athletes, jockeys, prize-fighters and the idle and self-advertising rich. On the other hand they

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provided a multitude of women, who had been forgotten by the older Press, with a great deal of useful, homely and entertaining reading-matter of a quite innocent kind. I will not attempt to strike the balance. The British people have something in them which resists all the experiments of the writing tribe, and both parties to this debate probably exaggerate the effect which is produced on their morals or their character by any use of the pen or the printing press. At the end of thirty years the typical British character is as remote from what one might suppose it to be from reading some of its chosen organs as at the beginning of this period, and the foreigner who tried to deduce it from the Press which it manifestly reads would beyond doubt go astonishingly astray. The old image of water off a duck's back seems to apply to this case. They read, they laugh and they go about their business.

But I am concerned now with the effect upon the public life, and that certainly must not be underrated. Serious political argument can only get through to the public with the aid of the Press, and the presumption of the modern popular newspapers that it is only one of many competing subjects, and by no means the most important, unquestionably makes consecutive politics far more difficult. Thirty years ago the newspapers were predominantly political and owned a steady allegiance to one or other of the two great parties. With few exceptions they were the servants and not the masters of the politicians and did their bidding without thought of any interest of their own which might conflict with it. In these days circulation becomes an object which must not be subordinated to the interests of any party or political leader, and the largest circulations develop an opportunist politics of their own which cuts across the schemes of all parties. Their allegiances and their loyalties are quite temporary, and the politician who claims their support is liable to a swift reminder that the newspaper has more important things to think about than his interests or the advancement of his career. Add to this that at all times a very few individuals have the power of deciding how much politics the millions of their readers

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shall have, and in what form they shall have it, and we are bound to conclude that the essential lines of communication between the public man and the public are very precarious and uncertain. What the great circulations say about politics in their leading articles may be comparatively unimportant, but their power of regulating the quantity and the quality, and of imparting bias and prejudice, is undoubtedly of great importance.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAKING OF OPINION

An Unsolved Problem—A Result of Great Circulations—Three Functions of the Press—Tradesmanship and Opinion—A Difficult Combination—Opinion the Subordinate Partner—The Newspaper Mind—Other-Mindedness—Newspapers and Democracy—The Simplification of Opinion—Journalism a Branch of Commerce—The Danger of that Theory—Effects on the Profession—Decline in Number of Newspapers—And of Journalists—Political Writing as a Career—Mass-Production and Its Results.]

I

HAVING indicated the general conditions in the previous chapter, let me now attempt a rather closer analysis of the part borne by journalism in public affairs and the making of opinion.

In a modern community the newspaper is an essential part of government by the people. Without newspapers Parliament would be a secret debating society, the public man would be cut off from the public, and the public be deprived of the essential material for a judgment on public affairs. The Press might get on without politics, but politics cannot get on without the Press. The relations between the two are nevertheless one of the most difficult of the problems of modern democracy.

The rotary printing machine is at the root of the trouble. When newspaper circulations were limited by the number that could be printed in the available space by machines producing five or six thousand copies an hour, there was a guarantee that one newspaper could not reach more than a small fraction of the population. To print an issue of the *Daily Mail* in such circumstances would have required a machine-room occupying a whole postal district. But with machines that produce 30,000 copies an hour and

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deliver them folded and counted, three or four newspapers may between them have a circulation equal to the entire adult population of the country. Instead, therefore, of having large numbers of newspapers catering for a variety of tastes, the modern world tends to have a few newspapers of enormous circulation, delivering the same product to masses of readers. Thus, while the readers of newspapers are constantly increasing, the number of different newspapers is either stationary or declining. In this respect the newspaper industry does but follow the prevailing tendency to mass production, but in the case of newspapers certain social and political consequences follow which do not attend any other form of production.

In much that is said and written on the subject, its salient characteristics appear to be overlooked. The modern daily newspaper performs three functions: (1) it supplies the public with news; (2) it is a medium for advertisements; (3) it furnishes opinion and comment on affairs of public importance. The first two of these functions are purely commercial, and the more impartially commercial they are the better. But the third becomes an imposture if it is anything but free and disinterested. There is no discredit in making profit and fortune by supplying news and advertisement, provided the news is unadulterated and a reasonable supervision is exercised over the advertisements. So far, nothing more need be exacted than honest and competent tradesmanship. But the supplying of opinion stands on a different footing. It is poisoned at its source, if it is not, as invariably it claims to be, the honest belief of the writer or group of writers who supply it, unaffected by any conscious commercial bias.

The root difficulty of the modern newspaper is that of combining the third of these functions with the other two. And that difficulty is every year increased by the enormous and inevitable preponderance of the commercial element in the making of a newspaper. To run an efficient daily newspaper requires an immense capital. It must pay an army of correspondents; it must be lavish in its cable and telegraph services; it must have its canvassers all over the

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country ; it must be equipped with the latest machinery and spend without stint on its distribution. It is not to be supposed that a great business built up at enormous cost and effort will be lightly risked on unpopular or eccentric opinions. With the growth of the commercial side the temptation to make opinion conform to the supposed prejudices of reader and advertiser becomes all but irresistible, and the supposed maker of opinion is thus converted into a more or less skilful guesser of what the largest number of readers and advertisers desire to be told.

Opinion, always the weakest of the three partners, becomes at this stage subordinate to the other two, and by that subordination ceases to be free and disinterested. In saying this I am not imputing dishonesty to the proprietors of newspapers or those who write for them. The newspaper mind evolved by the mass production is a thing apart from the ordinary judgment of human affairs. It habitually thinks in circulations. Its instinctive criterion is not whether a thing is good or bad in itself, but what the majority are likely to think about it. Many years ago I ventured to remonstrate with the proprietor of a widely circulated newspaper about the line it was taking upon certain military operations then proceeding. He told me I was quite wrong and he would show me. He thereupon rang for the circulation books and pointed triumphantly to the fact that the circulation had gone up from the day that this line was first taken. I found it impossible to persuade him that there was any gap in this reasoning. Long meditation on the probable opinions of large numbers of inarticulate people produces this singular detachment from what is commonly called the merits of an argument. He who has the perfect newspaper mind is neither Liberal, Conservative nor Labour, neither Free-Trader nor Protectionist ; neither Anglican nor Nonconformist ; and his judgment of men is solely whether they are likely to be popular or not, effective figures in a newspaper or incapable of being projected into the public mind. He talks habitually of what people are saying and thinking and appears to have no opinion of his own except upon what

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they are saying and thinking. The man with this mind is, as a rule, entirely unconscious of any lapse from duty or virtue when he gathers up the popular voices and gives them back as opinion. He is so other-minded, if I may coin that word—he dwells so much in the minds of other people—that he ceases to have a mind of his own. Whenever a new issue arises, he asks not whether this or that course is good or bad on its merits, but whether public opinion will be for it or against it. No one can have read the largest circulations for any length of time without being struck by their perpetual repetition of the argument that “public opinion won’t stand it.”

It may seem harsh to say that this other-mindedness is not free or disinterested, but in fact it cannot be so. Men who are in this peculiar way detached from individual judgment or conviction inevitably take the line that their commercial interests favour. Being without bias or prejudice between different opinions, they see no objection to giving the public what the public is supposed to want, and thereby fortifying the largest circulations and the immense advertisement revenues. But here we must discriminate. What the public of a particular newspaper wants is by no means always what the majority of the country wants. When the Liberals came to power with their enormous majority in 1906, they had nearly all the largest circulations against them. But the largest circulations, appealing in the main to conservative middle-class readers, were no doubt perfectly right in judging that the great majority of these readers and still more, the advertisers who went with them, were opposed to the main stream and would have resented any change to the other side. It is not an accident that the largest circulations are seldom or never on the side of advanced opinion. That follows inevitably from the fact that the readers of these journals, and those who advertise in them, are predominantly Conservative and are supposed to want on the whole Conservative opinions. But whatever their political opinions may be, all who go into the great market are under the same temptation—the temptation to substitute asser-

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tion for argument and to eliminate everything that cannot immediately be understood by people of simple minds.

2

The result is necessarily to accentuate what political philosophers in all time have considered to be the evils of democracy. The writer who caters for these vast audiences is like a speaker addressing a mass meeting through a megaphone. He must be very short and simple ; he must keep his audience in a state of excitement, he must not argue, he must assert. What Matthew Arnold called the perpetual semblance, without the reality, of hitting the right nail on the head is likely to be his principal accomplishment. His easiest way to success is to play on the "emotions of the herd," their patriotic fervour, their fears for their pockets, their suspicion of foreigners, their susceptibility to catch-cries. He can seldom or never afford to oppose a popular prejudice or challenge a conventional opinion. If he does so, it will generally be in the well-warranted belief that the temporary unpopular opinion will shortly be the popular one or that his own clients are on the unpopular side. In either case he has in mind not the merits or demerits of the particular point of view but the interests of his newspaper.

The late Mr. Kennedy Jones is supposed to have said that he found journalism a profession and left it a branch of commerce, and he appears to have entertained no doubt that the transition from the one to the other was in the line of modern progress. In this conception of the newspaper the editorial is brigaded with the news and advertisement departments in the pursuit of commercial success. The business of the journalist is not to dictate or create opinion but to express the current view in an acceptable and attractive manner, and the public is best served when this is done in a frankly commercial spirit without preaching, moralizing, or crusading. There is something to be said for this view, provided it is generally understood. No harm is done if the reader understands that editor and leader-

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writer are not attempting to define what is true and right but merely giving back to him what they conceive to be his own thoughts. The imposture only begins if the reader supposes that they are expressing an independent and disinterested view of what is in the public interest.

Here in fact is the great difficulty. The popular newspaper, while acting on the theory that the whole of its activities are branches of commerce, is unable to resist the temptation of presenting itself as an independent oracle and guide. Its tone is not less but rather more oracular than that of the old newspapers which frankly supposed themselves to be oracles. It retains all the airs of the morality which it has discarded; it preaches, asserts and lays down the law in a manner which has more of dogma and less of argument and persuasion than any previously used in the Press. It has also developed a remarkable skill in using its news columns for a subtle propaganda by suggestion. The readers of the modern popular newspaper may frequently be heard saying that they hate its politics and pay no attention to its leading article, but they cannot help being affected by its headlines, its catch-phrases, its presentation of the news, the stress which it lays on some things, the veil which it draws over others. A great newspaper proprietor is supposed to have said that "the power of the Press is the suppress," and he spoke of what he knew. By suppressing his name and refusing to report his speeches a great popular newspaper—or syndicate of popular newspapers—may go far to extinguish a public man. By suppressing one part of the facts and emphasizing another it may stand between the public and the truth.

In all attempts to record what are called the facts of life great allowance must of course be made for the honest infirmities of the human mind. Facts are not the simple things that unthinking people suppose them to be. They have innumerable facets which may be seen from a dozen different angles; perfectly honest statements of the same events may lead to entirely different conclusions. Truth or the nearest approach to it is reached through a variety

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of statements correcting each other's bias. The difficulty of the modern Press is that this variety of statement is more and more condensed into a few typical products which have the bias of the largest circulations. The opinion given us is commercialized opinion, and there are not enough varieties of it to enable us to be sure that the truth will prevail. If instead of one paper with a million readers there were ten with a hundred thousand readers, we might leave the truth to be fought out among the ten, but with a few papers of huge circulation, we have to reckon with the fact that immense numbers of readers never see more than one opinion or one presentation of the facts.

3

Another result follows which, though unseen by the public, is of great importance. Under the modern process the profession of journalism is constantly declining in numbers and therefore offering fewer opportunities and attractions to men of ability. This inevitably follows from the substitution of great circulations for relatively small ones. If there were ten newspapers with a hundred thousand readers instead of one newspaper with a million readers they would employ ten staffs instead of the one staff that the great circulation employs. Under the former condition the profession of journalism would grow with the growth of the population ; under the latter it actually declines, and in recent years has very rapidly declined¹. The number of new daily newspapers established in the last thirty years is very nearly zero ; the number that have been extinguished or amalgamated into syndicates is lamentably large. Not so many years ago there were eight evening newspapers in London ; at the time when I am writing there are only three, though the population has enormously increased in the interval.¹ The serious journalist, and especially the political journalist, suffers even more from this

¹ American journalism is apparently following the same course for the same reason. See an article in the *Century Magazine*, Sept., 1924, by Mr. Ernest Gruening, who speaks of journalism in America as "a dwindling profession."

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contraction of opportunity than the mere numbers reveal. For during the same period the space allotted to serious political writing has been constantly declining. The conductors of the popular papers have with few exceptions decided that their readers cannot digest a leading article of more than five or six hundred words, which makes it absurd to employ a staff of leader-writers of the old type that regularly filled three or four columns of a daily paper. To write a short leading article well is a fine art which I would by no means disparage, but it is inevitably the art of assertion or declamation rather than of argument, and if for convenience two writers are employed, the aggregate work in the week is certainly not more than would occupy about half the time of one able-bodied writer.

Politics, in fact, are only a small part of the activities of successful popular newspapers, and there is an almost unanimous opinion in the offices of these newspapers that they are dead-weight upon circulation, unless treated in this brief, crisp and lively manner. That may be a true judgment, but if so, political writing cannot be a profession for intelligent men who take themselves and their readers seriously. These can only find their opportunity in the weekly Press or on the dwindling number of newspapers of the old type which are frankly political and permit argument at reasonable length in their columns. In the others political writing tends to be the by-product of a lively journalism which imposes its standards and its methods upon the political as upon other items in the daily bill of fare. So far as quantity goes, W. T. Stead could easily have produced all the leading articles of a political kind that now appear on an ordinary day in three or four of the most successful London papers, and it is impossible to believe that the men who write them can find employment for more than a fragment of their working day on these particular labours.

I am often approached by young men of a political turn of mind who wish my advice upon journalism as a career. What can honestly be said about it? If a man is a journalist, he will be a journalist, and he will probably

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be unfit for any other occupation. But if he is dreaming of influential and independent writing, the pleasure and interest of which will compensate him for the fatigue and vexation and anonymity of his labour, he must be told that in all London there are scarcely a score of appointments that will give him the opportunity ; and that if he gets one of these and should happen to lose it, he will very probably fail to find another. He must be told that even this independent writing under the best of editors and newspaper owners has risks of its own which do not attach to any other calling—especially the risk that he may conscientiously differ from editor or proprietor and have no option but to resign. He must be told that outside this little ring of favoured appointments, there is no room for him and his kind or for any kind which is not prepared frankly to cater for a popular taste interpreted by its employers. In that truly there are fortunes awaiting a few successful performers which were altogether undreamt of by the laborious journalists of a previous period. But these fortunes, one must say frankly to the young man, are not to be won by “high-brows,” and the talents he must cultivate, if he wishes to secure them, are those of the popular entertainer.

We may sum it up by saying that the process of mass production in newspapers has the same economic results as in other industries, but adds to these certain political and social results which are unique. It concentrates in the hands of a few individuals who are responsible to nobody but themselves a power which is a serious rival to that of Parliament, and upon which in the last resort Parliament depends. A man may control the production of iron, steel, soap or matches and yet have no power over his neighbours beyond the circle of those whom he employs ; but a man cannot control a group of newspapers without having a power over the mind and thought of the entire community which far exceeds that of the most powerful patrons of rotten boroughs in pre-reform days. Further, the concentration of the control in a few hands leads to a corresponding concentration of the agents—the writers and the editors—

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through whom the control is exercised. As newspapers are amalgamated and circulations increase these necessarily become a diminishing number, more and more subject to uniform instructions from headquarters, and the play and variety of opinion, which might mitigate the process, are squeezed out. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that about six proprietors and a score of writers and editors between them make the entire opinion of the metropolitan Press that counts.

CHAPTER XXV

JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS

A Doubtful Frontier—The Old Division of Labour—Unveiling the Oracle—An Unequal Alliance—Effects on the Public Life—The Lure of Publicity—The Old Publicity and the New—Dangers of the Politician—Press Alliance—Ingratitude of the Press—The Gift of Publicity—High and Low Popularity—Press Villains and Heroes—Appeals to Reason and Emotion—Correctives of Emotion—The Control of the Few—Reaction in America—Hopes for the Future—The Responsibility of the Journalist—Understanding the Conditions.

I

THE effect on the public life of the conditions described in the previous chapters has been profound and subtle. According to the Victorian conception of journalism there was a frontier between the politician and the journalist which neither sought to pass. The politician did things and the journalist commented on them. The one was the artist and the other the critic, and each jealously guarded his own territory from the other. They might inform each other and have intimate relations with each other, but their separate spheres were well defined and not to be encroached upon from either side. Behind what was called the mask of anonymity, journalism during the nineteenth century developed one of the most remarkable and honourable of professional traditions. Men of great ability and high character gave their best to what they conceived to be a public service without seeking recognition or reward beyond a very moderate emolument for their labour. It was a point of honour with them never to claim credit for their work or even to admit the authorship of it except in the most intimate circles. They accepted without question a division of labour which gave publicity and its prizes to the politicians and reserved for them-

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selves just the satisfaction of the day's work well done. Many of them were students of affairs with a range of knowledge and experience possessed by few of the public performers, and their contribution, if it could have been known and valued, must have ranked far beyond that of the average Member of Parliament or Minister. They were content to give it all to their newspapers and accepted a public valuation of their services which assumed them to be of comparative unimportance in the world of affairs. The proprietors who employed them were generally of the same disposition. Most of them deliberately gave the control of their newspapers to the editors and staffs, subject to certain general definitions of policy, and remained in the background with the same studious modesty that they looked for in those whom they employed. The newspaper thus conducted was an oracle worked by anonymous beings whose self-suppression was the condition of their service.

It was not to be expected that the new and vigorous commercial men who came into the business in the nineties of the last century would be content with these conditions. Within a few years they had unveiled the oracle or, as some said, dethroned the idol, and revealed themselves as a rival power to Parliament and Cabinet. Their names were everywhere, and they boasted openly of the number of newspapers that they owned and controlled, and of the potency of the weapon that they held in their hands against Governments and Ministers. They entered openly into the competition for public honours, and almost everywhere crossed the line into the politicians' camp. Scarcely ever was the curtain lifted upon a combination which upset a Cabinet or changed a policy without a great newspaper-proprietor or prominent journalist being found at the centre of it, and generally in close alliance with an ambitious Minister or group of Ministers. The temptation on both sides was strong, and if the newspaper proprietor was lured by the prizes of the public life, the public man dreamt of new worlds which might be conquered by the conjunction of his talents with the enormous publicity

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that was offered him. But the alliance was from the beginning on very unequal terms. The newspaper magnate might treat politics and politicians as raw materials to be used or discarded according to the interests of his newspapers ; but the politician had always to consider imponderable things like the claims of party, the wrath of constituents, changes of public opinion drawing the masters of circulation into paths where he could not follow without wrecking his career. The difficulty is that one of the parties is, and the other is not, responsible to an authority outside himself.

For these reasons alliances between newspaper potentates and public men are always likely to be perilous and short-lived. The circumstances which favour them occur but seldom, and they are always liable to break down in recriminations in which each side charges the other with ingratitude. Far more important is the chronic influence which the great circulations exert upon the public life. They sensationalize it, reduce it to catch-cries and formulas, make it harder for serious men who rely on persuasion and argument and easier for shallow men who have their ears to the ground and their noses in the mud. The ambitious public man is tempted to dress himself up as popular comedian or hero of melodrama, and to enlist the services of press-agents who will keep the newspapers informed about his private doings. Governments follow the same example on a larger scale, and add publicity departments to their other activities, lest they too should incur the dire calamity of what is called "a bad Press."

There is, further, a subtle interplay of supply and demand between the two spheres. The newspaper creates the type of politician it wants, and the politician helps the newspaper to perpetuate the type. In proportion as it frowns on "heavy politics" and demands entertainment for its readers, the politician will supply the demand and reap his reward in an abundant publicity. In the days of reporting, the statesman obtained his publicity by his public speeches. If Gladstone or Joseph Chamberlain wanted advertisement, they had only to appear on the

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platform or take part in debate in the House of Commons. In these days when the most distinguished are not sure of a column in the third person, other sources must be tapped, if the stream of publicity is to be kept flowing. I remember hearing it said of one eminent man of our time that he counted every day lost in which his name did not appear in the *Daily Mail*.

Here spoke the true advertiser, but the feeding of the Press with convenient matter is a most laborious and harassing business, which must add greatly to the burden of the public life. Moreover, it is in the end self-stultifying. For it is the law of the peculiar relations between Press and politicians that the Press can never be satisfied, and is seldom grateful. In the inner circles of journalism there is generally an accurate measurement of all self-advertisers. They may be used, when they are useful, but they are seldom respected, and there is no scruple in turning them away when they have served their purpose. On the other hand there is a latent respect for the man who does not court these favours or fawn on those who dispense them ; and this in the long run will find expression, even through channels that are officially hostile. Public men would be saved from some disasters in their dealings with the Press, if they would remember that on the Press side the almost invariable presumption is that they are seeking their own advantage and not that of the newspaper, when they supply it with information or endeavour to establish intimate relations with it. That the newspaper is free and that the politician is sufficiently paid with the day's paragraph is the ruling principle of Fleet Street. This is entirely in the public interest, and it places a salutary limit upon the mutual log-rolling which may be a temporary convenience of the newspaper. The ingratitude of the Press has in recent times been a constant theme of lamentation in high quarters, but this power of requiting good with evil is the most prized possession of English newspapers and the final guarantee to the public against conspiracies between politicians and newspapers for their undoing.

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The thorough understanding of these conditions is the way of safety for politicians in their dealings with the Press. Let it be grasped at the beginning that the interest of the newspaper will in the long run or at any critical moment override the interests of the politician, and the foundation will be truly laid. Let it be understood next that the granting of Press favours will be contemptuous in proportion as they are solicited and the piling up of a debit rather than a credit account. Let it be understood finally that a reputation for self-advertisement is extremely damaging to the character of a public man, and that it is easily bestowed by Fleet Street upon those whom it desires to chasten. It is idle to deny that publicity is an object of desire to a politician in a modern democracy, but it may be purchased at a cost which is in the long run disastrous, and those who are not deterred by native modesty may usefully be warned of the risks they run when they set out to woo the Press.

As a matter of fact the wooing is for some unnecessary and for others futile. There are public men as there are writers who are by nature "best-sellers." Whatever they do or say, they will be in the newspapers and nothing can keep them out. They have a natural affinity with the largest circulations, which will seize them and exploit them without asking their leave or being asked by them. But this is an endowment of nature which cannot be counterfeited by any effort. Scores of clever people have endeavoured to win fame and fortune by imitating the style of the great popular novelists, but none of them, so far as I know, has ever succeeded. So it is with politicians. The men without this popular gift can never acquire it; they will always falter and blunder in their approach to the common mind which the gifted few apprehend by instinct. Whatever their disguise, they will always be "heavy metal" to the largest circulations.

Some men there are of the highest class, who combine both qualities. The popular politician may be a Gladstone

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or he may be a Bottomley. The highest popularity is the greatest of the statesman's gifts and the lowest the corruption of them all. The normal case lies between the two extremes and is always in danger of sliding downwards. But this country has in past times been well served by distinguished men without the gift of popularity who have nevertheless risen to the highest place ; and it would be a calamity if the modern Press were either to extinguish them or place obstacles in their way. There are, I think, good reasons for hoping that this will not happen. The public easily grows weary of the Press heroes, and its inclination is to turn from them to men who are supposed to be steady and tranquil. It wonders whether after all it did well to depose Mr. Asquith and Lord Grey ; it turns to Mr. Bonar Law and Mr. Baldwin in the belief that they will walk in the old ways. In these reactions the plain men get a little more than their due, and the country risks getting quiet incompetence in place of noisy cleverness. But these examples show the precariousness of all manufactured reputations and the permanence of the demand for steady character in public men. No one in these days can promise any sort of public man an easy career or a certain reward. Whatever his method, he must be steeled against mortifications and disappointments, and the buffetings of fate and chance. But I believe it is still true that a man of high character will live down and in the end be the gainer from any concerted hostility in the Press, if he keeps within his own boundaries. The Press villain comes to the top when the Press hero is dethroned. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman won the greatest popular triumph of his time after being for six years the butt of the popular Press. Mr. Gladstone was at least as much helped as hurt by the attacks of the newspapers. The newspaper magnate can never be sure that he will not make the man whom he is endeavouring to mar and endow him with just the popular qualities in which he is lacking. The one essential thing is that the public man should keep his head and not endeavour to disarm his newspaper assailants by favours and concessions. On that ground they will always beat him, whereas,

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if he stands firm, he will earn their respect and even perhaps obtain their favours without asking.

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It is improbable, I think, that we shall in any near future see a repetition of the manœuvres between politicians and the newspapers which overthrew Governments and extinguished individuals between 1914 and 1918. The virtual suspension of Parliament gave newspapers a power which they do not exercise in normal times, and the atmosphere of war furnished a unique opportunity of playing upon popular alarms and prejudices. In no other circumstances would such a campaign as was conducted against Lord Haldane and subsequently against Mr. Asquith have had a chance of success. In normal circumstances the danger of the mass Press is not that it will repeat these particular operations, but that it will make serious argument increasingly difficult. With all the varieties of opinion squeezed into one or two moulds and expression everywhere being sought for crude and simple views, it is difficult to see how the rising generation can be induced to put the requisite amount of thought into its politics. The correctives must be sought for the time being in the extension of oral teaching and debate. The politicians must go behind the newspapers and spend a great deal more of their time in talking to and with their constituents. The "Summer Schools" must send out their missionaries, and not merely to the conventional meetings where reporters are present, but to the village greens and the clubs and wherever two or three are assembled together who like to talk about public affairs. The Labour men and the Socialists are doing this all the time, and by doing it they have succeeded in building up a powerful party with almost no assistance from the Press, and in the teeth of its constant opposition. If other parties are unable to follow this example, they may find one day that in spite of their tremendous Press and their powerful organizations they are at the mercy of opponents who, whatever the merits of

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their doctrines, have at least endeavoured to talk seriously to a multitude which is eager to listen. Against this form of steady propaganda the shallow politics of the largest circulations may prove to be a castle of sand.

The other chief corrective is the extreme publicity which the modern newspaper proprietors desire for themselves. Their names are perpetually in their own newspapers and in all other newspapers. They announce their latest exploits in amalgamation with a shout of triumph which puts the public on its guard. The oracular anonymity which enveloped the old Press in an atmosphere of mystery and awe fades into the common knowledge that some half dozen individuals control an immense proportion of the newspapers of the country, and the opinions that they disseminate are correspondingly discounted. More and more it is felt that the wielding of the enormous power over the minds and feelings of men and women which the control of the Press confers is an exception to the democratic rule that political power should be attended by a definite responsibility. Suspicion of and hostility to newspaper proprietors grow inevitably out of these operations and in proportion to their magnitude and commercial success. The newspaper reader demands a guarantee that his newspaper is "free," and begins to look with suspicion upon all expressions of opinion presented to him by a syndicated Press.

The American Press went through this phase and there was a time when certain of the most successful newspaper-owners found themselves outcasts in American society. To this day the editorial has not recovered the place of power which it enjoyed at the time of the Civil War, and for some years later. But no one can have read American newspapers during the last few years without being conscious of a strong reaction from sensationalism to a serious and careful handling of public affairs. With its immense headlines and splashing display, the front sheet of an American paper still retains its shop-window appearance, but turn the page and you will generally find a succession of long and serious articles written in a manner which the editor of an

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English popular newspaper would almost certainly have considered far above the intelligence of his readers. When the Washington Conference was sitting, the various phases of its deliberations were treated by the American Press with a fullness and wealth of expert knowledge which excited the admiration of English journalists. Even the most serious of London newspapers would scarcely have ventured to give their readers the mass of material, comment and discussion covering the most complicated issues of foreign policy which the majority of American papers presented to their readers at this time, and which a large number of them give daily at all times. From my own observation I should say that the quantity and variety of the news about Europe given in American papers far exceeds what has been provided in most English papers since the war.

One may hope that a similar reaction will take place in this country. We hear much of the "magnates," but there are other more modest proprietors still in the field who have shown great public spirit in upholding the cause of serious journalism through the bad times, and signs are not wanting that they may yet have their reward. A mean may yet be found between the solemnity of the old type and the irresponsibility of the new. In any case it seems an absurdity that in a great and wealthy country the serious public should not be numerous enough to support more than the exiguous number of newspapers that now appeal to an educated audience. The failure or extinction of this type would be a real calamity to the public and a serious impoverishment of the public life. They leaven the lump ; they give a lead to other newspapers as well as to their own readers and the influence they exert is out of all proportion to their circulations.

Another hope is in the improvement of the status of the working journalist, and in his resistance to the theory that his profession is a branch of commerce. He too—often against his inclination—is being driven into the lime-light by the process which is breaking down the anonymity of the Press. The very paucity of his numbers is more

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and more making it an open secret who writes what in the principal newspapers, and the increasing vogue of the signed article drives him from his cover. Under the old conditions, there was everything to be said for anonymity ; under the new, publicity may be the salvation of the journalist. Men who have their own reputation and character to think of cannot afford to display themselves in public as the mouth-pieces of their employers. Their responsibility must be their own and by claiming respect for it they may win back the power which the intellectual side of journalism has ceded to the commercial. The working journalist has taken too modest a view of his function in the public life. He speaks generally to a far larger audience than any but the most eminent of politicians ; he is by the necessity of the case a far more continuous and careful student of affairs than the majority of public men, and his part in the great debate by which wisdom is supposed to be evolved is perhaps the most exacting of any. It is not to his interest and still less in the interests of those whom he serves that he should be sheltered from the responsibility which falls upon others who take part in the public life, or that he should be absolved from it by the plea that he is acting under the duress of proprietor or editor. Nothing, I think, is more urgent in the present state of the Press than a strong professional organization of working journalists which should claim this responsibility for its members and protect them in the exercise of it.

For the rest the most important thing is that the conditions of the modern Press should be thoroughly understood by the public man, by the journalist and by the readers of newspapers. This understanding will of itself go far to work a cure. The public man will be warned of the perils he runs in flirtations with the Press ; the journalist will be encouraged to assert himself against the machine which would use him as a cog-wheel or a spare part ; the reader will not be imposed upon by manufactured opinion.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PRESS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Bismarck's Way of Peace—The Rudimentary Parliament—The Foreign Correspondent—His Two Functions—A Dual Audience—Newspapers and National Policy—Difficulties of the Working Journalist—The Consequences of his Writing—The Supposition that he is "Inspired"—Foreign Governments and Newspapers—The Use of Secret Service Funds—Isvolsky's Operations—Busch and Bismarck—The "Little Archer"—Discrediting the Press—The English Attitude—The Need of Knowledge—War and the Press—A Concrete Example—Keeping the Peace and Sounding the Alarm—The War of Tongue and Pen.

I

SO far what has been said about the Press relates mainly to its activities in domestic politics. Something remains to be said about its functions in international affairs.

Bismarck, who as I shall show presently, was one of the worst corrupters of the Press, is reported to have said that his prescription for keeping the peace of Europe was to hang a dozen editors. That may or may not be desirable, but the Press is at all events a rudimentary substitute for the parliament of mankind which is the dream of the pacifist. Through it the nations do in some sort debate with each other, and without it they would be utterly cut off from knowledge of each other. A world without newspapers might seem admirably suited to the operations of secret diplomacy, but only a very confident kind of secret diplomat could imagine that he would deal wisely with the complexities of modern democratic states without the knowledge that newspapers afford him. The supposition need not be discussed. It is certain that the mass of people will not trust their interests and their lives to any body of politicians or diplomatists without an independent check on

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them. Justly or unjustly, there is a great suspicion of politicians in the modern world and a general disposition to look to newspapers to keep them in order. Newspapers also no doubt are under suspicion, but there is a greater sense of security when one suspected character is set to watch another. As we see to-day, the first effort of the dictators, whether in Russia or Italy, is to put the Press under their heel.

But the part played by the newspapers in international affairs is so important, and at the same time so difficult to follow in its results and reactions that a careful study of it is an essential part of the technique of foreign affairs and as important to the working journalist as to the politician. The accumulating mass of information about the operations of the Press and its relations with Governments in the years before the war must some day be carefully examined, and the truth ascertained. Nothing is more desirable for the peace of nations than to know where they stand in this matter and how far the claim of newspapers to be independent organs of opinion can be sustained against the evidence that a considerable number of them in some countries is controlled by Governments or bribed and suborned by different kinds of sinister interests. Here I can only glance at what might very well be the subject of an entire volume.

Let me look at it first from the point of view of the journalist—the honest journalist who is trying to do his best in a newspaper which is free from all sinister influences. In foreign affairs, as in all its other activities, the Press has simultaneously to perform two functions—to give news and to form opinion. But in foreign affairs it is much more difficult to keep these functions apart than in domestic. In domestic affairs a well-conducted newspaper keeps the two departments separate, reporters and news services in one, editor and leader-writers in another. In foreign affairs one correspondent generally combines both duties. His message is part news and part opinion, and nearly always expresses some views of his own. Naturally and inevitably he tends to make these chime in with the policy

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of his paper, e.g. on the question of the Ruhr *Daily Mail* correspondents tended to report that the French were having great success, whereas other correspondents reported that they were encountering great difficulties. The News Agencies, which make a praiseworthy effort to remain impartial, to a certain extent counteract this, but a completely impartial news service such as the newspaper reader expects in home affairs is in practice unattainable. As a rule only controversial subjects interest readers of foreign news, and we almost necessarily get this news presented through the distorting medium of opinion.

This is not necessarily bad if all sides are fairly represented and all are free to speak their minds. But at this point a peculiar difficulty presents itself which is felt, I think, by every journalist who handles foreign affairs, whether he is a correspondent or an editor or a leader-writer. He is addressing two or more audiences which may draw widely different conclusions from the same argument and some of these conclusions may be entirely different from what he intends. He may sit in a London newspaper office and write an article attacking his own Government and the next day see the whole of it reprinted in a foreign newspaper and used for the quite different purpose of stiffening a foreign Government which is in controversy with his own. A pacifist, for example, may criticize his own Government for its alleged imperialist or militarist tendencies, and see his argument seized by the militarists of another country and used as an incitement to their Government to increase its armaments.

The solution of this problem requires a combination of skill and wisdom which cannot always be reckoned upon in journalists more than in other human beings. It is so much the easiest course, when tempers become heated, to fall into line with what is deemed to be the patriotic view, and to save yourself from the criticism and misrepresentation which will surely be your portion if you do anything else. Yet it is precisely at this moment that a newspaper may render the best service to its own country by boldly taking an unrepresentative view and countering the

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popular view. I think W. T. Stead performed such a service in the year 1885 when almost single-handed he threw the whole of his influence against war with Russia on the Penjdeh incident, and again in 1904 I think a similar service was performed by one or two newspapers which pleaded for delay and arrest of judgment at the time of the Dogger Bank incident. But all action of this kind exposes the journalist to the taunt that he is encouraging the enemy, and the penalties which he incurs, if he fails in his object, are so heavy that he is under strong temptation to follow the prevalent opinion, when passions are aroused. The statesman therefore who encourages the Press to a bellicose attitude in the belief that he can pull it back at his discretion is on dangerous ground. The passions kindled easily pass the point at which either newspapers or statesmen can control them.

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In Europe to-day the tendency in most countries is for the Press to close its ranks and range itself on some uniform line of policy, supposed to be national and patriotic, whenever feeling becomes acute. In France almost the entire Press was for the occupation of the Ruhr. Outside a few Socialist organs there was scarcely a whisper of criticism. The same arguments were repeated from day to day in almost the same language in a score of newspapers as if the writers were all drawing from the same source. The Paris newspapers are unsparing critics of their own Governments at other times, but nearly all are apparently at the disposal of the French Foreign Office whenever any question arises which is supposed to touch a vital interest of France. This discipline may seem admirable or the reverse, according to the point of view, but its result is undoubtedly to suppress minority views, which may be far more important and widespread than the newspapers on these occasions might lead us to suppose. One of the difficulties of government by Press is that in times of excitement it is almost impossible to obtain any

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sort of hearing for the minority. Everyone is afraid of saying what he might wish to say to his own countrymen for fear of encouraging the enemy.

Few journalists realize the enormous audience they may be addressing when they write on foreign affairs for a newspaper of standing. These affairs are often only a part of the work of an all-round journalist, and he must take them in his stride. Any morning or evening he may find himself called upon to write a leading article on some event in Europe or America. He does it to the best of his ability on the spur of the moment and probably thinks no more about it. Yet it is quite probable that this article or a summary of it will go the round of the world on the wings of Havas, Reuter, or the Associated Press, and, if it touches American affairs, it will perhaps be cabled in full by the American correspondents. If he has said anything disagreeable about America it will be pretty sure to appear in an immense group of papers extending from New York to San Francisco the next day. The writer on foreign affairs in newspapers of standing is thus addressing a far more extensive and varied audience than he could possibly obtain on any other subject even in newspapers of the largest circulations ; and his words may have results altogether disproportionate to the time and thought he spends on them, or to anything that he intended.

It is extremely difficult for the daily journeyman to digest this condition or to realize what it means. The few public men whose voices carry in the same way speak very seldom, and only after long deliberation. The journalist speaks often and deliberation is not always possible. It is a constant astonishment to him to discover the importance that other people attach to writings that he has thrown off lightly and forgotten at the end of the day. This is true also in domestic affairs, but in foreign affairs it is a serious embarrassment. There are at least half-a-dozen London newspapers in which nothing can be written about a foreign Government or any of its Ministers which is not immediately docketed and filed in the Foreign Office referred to and stored up by some tenacious memory. It is one of the

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duties of an ambassador to call the attention of his Government to all serious criticisms of them in the Press of the country to which he is accredited, and an ambassador who omitted it, at least under the old diplomacy, would have been seriously taken to task. The journalist may think lightly of his own efforts, but the subject or victim of his criticism seldom forgets, however highly placed he may be.

In the year 1907 when staying in Berlin I happened to be introduced to the famous Baron von Holstein of the German Foreign Office. Not only did he greet me without civility, but he became almost inarticulate with anger over an article which I had written on German affairs at the end of the year 1905. I was at a considerable disadvantage, for I had entirely forgotten what it contained, and he apparently knew it by heart. In the *Life of Herr Ballin*, another article of mine is reproduced in facsimile with elaborate annotations by the ex-Kaiser, many of them scornful and contemptuous, but all of them apparently assuming that it was an inspired and most important communication from the British Government.

Here we touch another difficulty in the Press debate on foreign affairs. Hardly any newspaper obtains credit from its foreign contemporaries for speaking without official prompting. When the *Westminster Gazette* was quoted abroad between the years 1906 and 1914, there was almost invariably placed after it in brackets "the organ of Sir Edward Grey." It is a chastening thought for the journalist that he gets his hearing not on his own merits but on the spurious reputation of being the mouthpiece of a Minister. But so it is, and disclaimers are generally useless. If I had said what was the literal truth that never once in the ten years that he was Foreign Minister had Sir Edward Grey ever suggested to me to write an article in the *Westminster Gazette* or ever proposed to me to take one line ✓ rather than another in foreign affairs, I should have been met with a polite incredulity implying "Well, of course you are bound to say that, but *we* know all about the relations of Ministers and the Press."

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Evidently it is a very complicated business, this bandying of opinion about international affairs in the newspapers of Europe. One would like to think of it as a free and open debate dealing with things as they are, and expressing the opinion of the best unofficial minds in each country. Actually an economy of the truth is imposed on nearly all those who take part in it, and of a considerable number of them it is impossible to discover whether they speak for themselves or are prompted by their Governments or by the hidden hand of some undisclosed interest. It is evidently asking too much of human nature to expect Governments and Ministers to keep their hands off the great engine of publicity and propaganda which the Press provides, and in many European countries there is scarcely even a pretence that they do so. The numerous secret documents published since the war teem with evidence of the attempts of Governments to influence the Press of foreign countries, and a large part of the Secret Service funds so liberally expended by most of them seem to have been applied to this object. In January 1924, the French Socialist journal, *L'Humanité*, published a series of articles giving full details of the alleged operations of a Russian agent upon certain French newspapers in the years before the war, and none of them, so far as I am aware, has been seriously challenged.¹ Many of them are confirmed by the letters of Isvolsky published by the Bolsheviks and translated in *Le Livre Noir*. Again and again we find Isvolsky asking for more money to procure the insertion of articles desired by his Government, pointing to the successes which another Government has obtained by the liberal use of money, and reporting gleefully on the success he has had when he has been liberally provided.² The armaments industry appears to have been another effective operator in these years, and it was even alleged in a debate in the Reichstag before the war that one of the great armament firms

¹ For a convenient summary of these articles see *The Nation and Athenæum*, Feb. 9, 1924.

² See *supra*, p. 52.

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had been subsidizing foreign newspapers to fan national animosities and so keep up the demands for weapons upon which its profits depended.

Finance also operates in the same way. The late Lord Rothschild once showed me a communication from a foreign Government for which he was floating a loan in this country, asking him what sum of money would be required for the English Press. In order to guide him the foreign Government enclosed a list of sums disbursed to the European Press. I cannot charge my memory with the details, but they were very large sums, and his correspondents took it for granted that the British Press would need to be paid on at least the same scale if not a higher one. It gave Lord Rothschild great satisfaction, as he told me, to be able to reply that if he presented himself at any reputable English newspaper office with such a proposal, he would be fortunate if nothing more happened to him than to be shown the door. Without being pharisaical, we may at least claim that the British Press is above suspicion in this respect. In nearly forty years I have never heard a whisper of this kind of corruption, and the same, I think, may be said about the American Press.

Money apart, Busch's "Secret Pages in Bismarck's History" is the classic of this part of the subject. It shows the great Chancellor incessantly manipulating the Press, using it without conscience or scruple to hurt his private enemies, to instil poison between nations, to destroy or undermine an opponent when open hostility seemed undesirable. The complacent Busch relates it all with the utmost candour and apparently without the slightest suspicion of how his narrative will impress other people. Day by day we see him at work in this factory of lies :

March 3, 1871. Read over to the Minister, at his request, an article which he ordered yesterday and for which he gave me the leading ideas. It was to be dated from Paris, and published in the *Kölnische Zeitung*. He said :

"Yes, you have correctly expressed my meaning. The composition is good both as regards its reasoning and the facts which it

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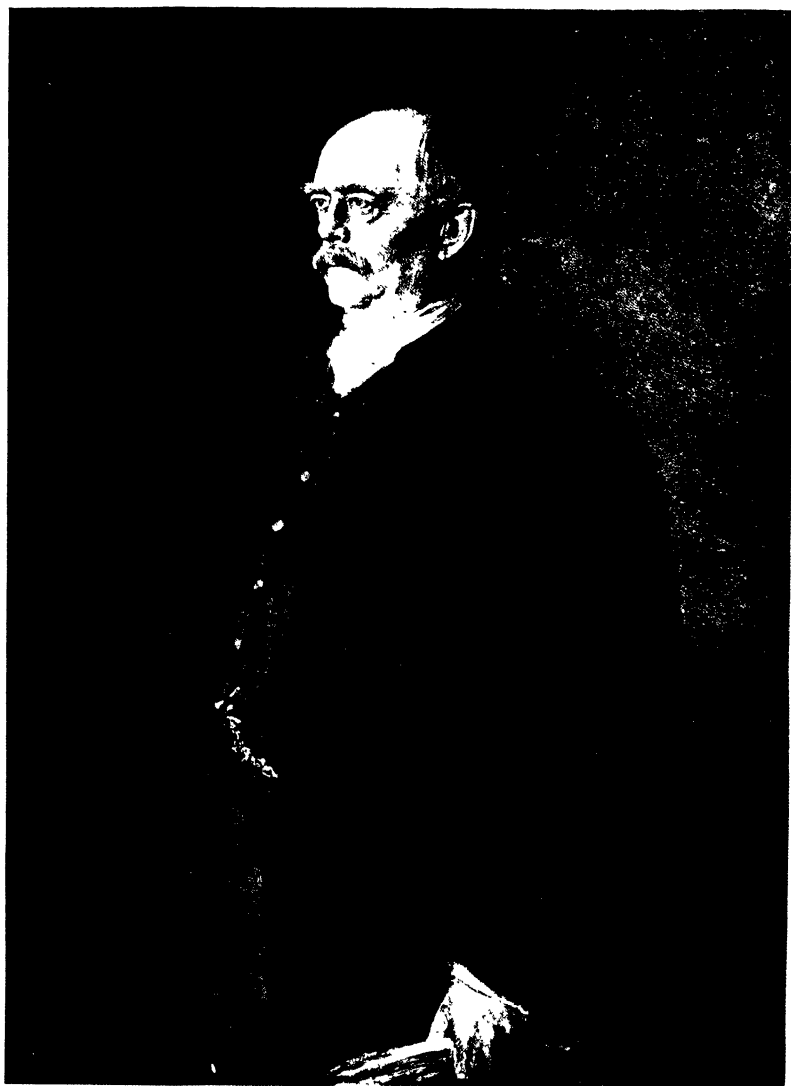
contains. But no Frenchman thinks in such logical and well-ordered fashion, yet the letter is understood to be written by a Frenchman. It must contain more gossip and you must pass lightly from point to point. In doing so, you must adopt an altogether French standpoint. A Liberal Parisian writes the letter and gives his opinion as to the position of his party towards the German question, expressing himself in the manner usual in statements of that kind."

Finally, adds Busch in brackets, "Count Bismarck dictated the greater part of the article which was forwarded by Metzler in its altered form to the Rhenish newspaper." To Bismarck and Busch this was apparently all in the day's work.

Or take the scene in 1888 when the Chancellor sends for Busch and incites him to a long and libellous attack on Queen Victoria and her daughter, the Empress Frederick, as part of his scheme to prevent the proposed marriage of her daughter Princess Victoria to Prince Alexander of Battenberg. Busch drinks it all in and dutifully pours it out into the columns of the *Grenzboten*. But the next day it suits Bismarck's purpose to disown it, so he puts a paragraph into the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*:—

We are in a position to state that the Imperial Chancellor, as was indeed to be expected, is most indignant at the notorious article in the *Grenzboten* slandering the Empress Victoria, and that he has given expression to his condemnation in very strong terms. In this connexion exceptional importance is to be attached to the sympathetic article in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* on the Queen of England's visit.

Was the writer of the article in the *Grenzboten* put out by this paragraph? Not in the least, it was an expected incident for a man of his trade. "A disclaimer?" he comments, "Why not? Quite in order! *Tempora mutantur*? But I shall never change towards him, nor he doubtless towards me. He will once more call for his 'little archer' when he again wants an arrow shot into the face of this or that sun, and Buschlein's bow shall never fail him. My 'libellous article' was, I see, indignantly denounced



PRINCE VON BISMARCK

From the Painting by the Franz von Lenbach

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in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Neue Freie Presse*. In doing so the former described the *Grenzboten* as a 'publication which, for well-known reasons, is read with attention throughout Germany.' The *Neue Freie Presse* spoke of a want of tact which would be regarded as impossible if it were not in evidence in black or white. Excellent ! In this manner what I had written secured a wide circulation, particularly as other journalistic hacks will probably without wishing it have recommended the article in a similar way." And then as epilogue to the chapter in which this transaction is recorded he writes :

After the death of the Emperor Frederick I wrote to Bucher (another of Bismarck's agents) a few lines expressing the satisfaction I felt that we were relieved of that incubus and that his place was now to be taken by a disciple and admirer of the Chief.

An aspiration which was justly rewarded. Two years later Busch relates how "the Chief" (still in office) invited him to write an article attacking the said disciple and admirer with a view to getting it inserted in the London *Daily Telegraph*—which, needless to say, declined those goods.¹

These are samples taken almost at random from the three volumes of this disgusting record. The figure of Buschlein, the "little archer" discharging his poisoned arrows at the instigation of his chief who smilingly disclaimed him is, I think, one of the most repulsive in the subterranean history of these times. It was of course impossible that these methods should be practised for any length of time without destroying the character of the Press and its good repute with the public. The German "reptile" Press inevitably became a byword to the world, and though the name did serious injustice to many well-conducted and honourable newspapers, no journalist can have travelled

¹ For another example of Bismarck's methods see his "Reflections and Reminiscences," Vol. II, 177-8. "My official proceedings against Arnim had been provoked by his refusal to obey official instructions. I said nothing in the legal proceedings about the fact of his having used the money which had been given him to represent our policy in the French Press (6,000 to 7,000 thalers) in attacking our policy and my position in the German Press" (1873).

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in Germany in the years before the war without having it brought home to him that his profession was under serious suspicion. In the post-war memoirs of German generals and politicians the complaint is universal that their Government was without the means of rallying opinion which the British seemed to possess. It may reasonably be suggested that a Press which they had themselves discredited by their manipulations in time of peace was not likely to serve them well in the emergency of war.

Whatever may be the defects of the British Press it may at least claim to have been free from these abuses. The habit of using newspapers for what is called propaganda was indeed a feature of war-time in this country as in all others. Whether even for that purpose more good or harm was done by this use of it is still a debated point. But at least it was entered into on both sides with their eyes open, and when some public men showed a tendency to prolong it after the peace, the newspapers generally were quick to intimate that they were not at the disposal of the Government. In English newspapers official news is always cheerfully printed if frankly given as official news, but not Ministerial views wrapped up to look like independent news or comment. I think it may fairly be claimed that this is the normal relation of British newspapers and the Foreign Office, even when a Government of their own party is in power. Information they will take, and even advice, provided they make their own use of it, but not any of them are the organs of the Foreign Office in the sense that some French newspapers appear to be organs of the Quai d'Orsay. The *Times* has always had the reputation abroad—and justly—of conveying in foreign affairs the central view which is probably at a critical moment the view of the British Government. But it would be absurd to say that the *Times* ever was, even in the days when it was supposed to be most official, at the disposal of any Government. If one reads either Dasent's "Life of Delane" or Sir E. T. Cook's admirable study of that great editor, one finds that though he received liberally both advice and information from Ministers and powerful people,

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he gave almost nothing in return. Nothing would induce him to accept a line from Downing Street, unless he thought it to be a good line, and nothing could guarantee his official benefactor from a swingeing blow in return, if Delane supposed him to have deserved it. Here again we see working in a quite salutary way the power which the Press possesses of returning evil for good.

4

Things being what they are, it is highly important that those who handle foreign affairs, whether Ministers, officials or journalists, should know their way about the European Press world and under-world. A large part of the right measurement of opinion consists in knowing which papers are respected and which not, which writers are influential and of good repute and which are disregarded by their countrymen. The habit into which newspapers easily fall of quoting inelegant extracts from each other is much aggravated when these are dredged from disreputable or unimportant sources and given a prominence which would be exaggerated if they came from papers of the first class. Nothing is more common than for Englishmen travelling abroad to see long and quarrelsome quotations in foreign newspapers from English newspapers which they know to be entirely negligible, and no doubt the same mistake is frequently made by English newspapers in dealing with the foreign Press. In the absence of any trustworthy means of discounting worthless opinion, the average well-informed newspaper-reader will do well to discard all seemingly mischievous extracts from newspapers whose names are not familiar to him ; but since the majority of newspaper-readers are not versed in foreign affairs it is unfortunately still possible to make great play with anything that has once appeared in print, and the inferior breed of statesmen have even been known to plant articles in obscure newspapers for the purpose of having them transmitted abroad.

The European Press under-world, as depicted in the

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secret documents from German and Russian sources which have been published since the war, somewhat resembles Satan's invisible kingdom revealed. At the best and even when the writers were honest and their newspapers above reproach, it tended to be a suspicious and quarrelsome world in which full expression was given to all the things that diplomatists would have liked but did not venture to say to one another. It is of course desirable that when feelings are genuinely wrought up they should be frankly expressed in the newspapers, for suppression would then be more dangerous than exaggeration. But the temptation to stoke up national feeling is very great, especially among newspapers of large circulation, and their native quarrelsomeness combined with the always increasing facilities for controversy by cable has undoubtedly increased the difficulty of keeping the peace in recent years. It is quite true, as newspaper proprietors constantly tell us, that war makes very unprofitable conditions for newspapers, but a lively anticipation of war, I am afraid, does not, and enterprising newspapers which exploit the anticipation run a considerable risk of being landed in the reality.

What it may be asked are the remedies ?

Frankly I know of none except to put the public on its guard. In some remote future the League of Nations may with general consent and even with the consent of newspapers themselves set up a tribunal to deal with international libel by a process analogous to that for other libels in the ordinary courts. But in most European countries the law of libel is a very feeble thing even in domestic quarrels, and there is certainly no general opinion which would sanction its extension to the international sphere. To put newspapers under the control of their Governments would be much worse than useless, since Governments themselves have been among the worst offenders in the manipulation of the Press ; and to increase their control would be to give them the means of extinguishing their critics and making the rest their tools. All these supposed remedies are in the clouds. But after what it has learnt, let the public beware of all newspaper campaigns

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on foreign affairs, and let it be specially on its guard when the great circulations in different countries open their guns on each other. In the meantime it cannot be too often said that the positions of foreign editor and foreign correspondent to any of the great newspapers are among the most responsible in the world, and should be filled by men of high integrity and ability. Upon them rests the duty of interpreting countries to each other and enabling the public to pick its way safely through the mazes of false and manipulated opinion.

5

The contention between this country and Germany in the ten years before the war raised in their acutest form all the difficult and perilous questions glanced at in this chapter, and as a concrete example of modern Press tendencies, no period is better worth study. An English journalist in these years may quite honestly have held any one of three opinions :

1. That the danger of war was so great that he must seize every opportunity of rousing his countrymen to its imminence.

2. That the danger of war was so great that he must carefully avoid any language that would inflame the quarrel or send sparks flying into the powder magazine.

3. That the danger was greatly exaggerated and would probably subside, if the scaremongers of the two countries could be suitably rebuked and induced to hold their peace.

I suggest that each of these opinions might have been honestly held, not that all were equally intelligent. I cannot imagine anyone who lived through the Algeiras crisis of 1906 and the Agadir crisis of 1911 and saw anything of either from within failing to realize that the situation was always dangerous. But it was precisely at that point that the difficulty began. It is only after the event that wars are certain and inevitable. During the forty years of my journalistic experience we have been twice on the brink of war with Russia, and at least once on the brink

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of war with France. Up to the last moment it was impossible to say that the danger which had been averted in the first two Anglo-German or Franco-German crises might not be averted in the third. In proportion to the danger, so was the responsibility of increasing it by bitterness or recrimination, and equally the responsibility of lulling one's countrymen into a false security. In such an emergency it requires superhuman ability and sagacity to steer a moderately prudent and wise course. It is safe for your own reputation to predict war, because, if it does not come off, your forecast will be forgotten, and if it does come off, you will be hailed as a true prophet. But no one can say that the constant prediction of war does not increase the probability of war or create the atmosphere in which what you profess to abhor is likely to come to pass. Then, again, in the world of competitive armaments, how can you urge your Government to arm, or create the public opinion which will provide the taxes for armaments without stirring up bellicose passions and defeating your own object by inflaming the other side and inciting it to corresponding efforts? The pressure to increase our navy was, I believe, essential to our very existence, but every newspaper campaign here did the work of the German Navy League much more effectively than they could do it for themselves, and any great military agitation must have increased the danger of a "preventive" war.

There is no cut and dried solution of this problem and no experience of one case will help a journalist much with the next. It did not follow that because a pacific and conciliatory line helped to keep the peace with France and Russia, the same methods would keep the peace with Germany. It does not follow that because they failed with Germany, they will fail with the next Power with whom we may find ourselves in relations of friction or competition. All that can be said in general terms is that chronic and prolonged recrimination between the newspapers of two countries is both a dangerous symptom and a provoking cause of national ill-will. Each side may deem that it is only doing its duty in sounding the alarm, and one may be

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to blame and the other not, but the net result is to inflame passion and prepare the way for the appeal to arms.

However they solve these problems, it seems to me of the utmost importance that journalists should constantly bear in mind one vital difference between controversy on foreign affairs and controversy on domestic politics. Good manners are desirable even in domestic affairs, but at the worst the issue will be decided by the ballot-box, whereas in foreign affairs it may easily be decided on the battlefield. The editor of the *Morning Post* and myself may detest each other's opinions and say so with all possible frankness, but I shall not shoot Mr. Gwynne and he will not shoot me. The likelier event is that we shall dine together and enjoy a very pleasant evening. But if I am denouncing a Frenchman or a German or a Russian, it is always a possibility that we shall shoot one another or rather, to speak quite accurately, not shoot *one another*—for we are mostly exempt from military service—but send a vast number of our respective countrymen either to shoot each other or asphyxiate each other with poison gas.

This ultimate liability of it all is what must weigh on men with any sense of responsibility, and it will presently, one hopes, be reinforced by a keener perception on the part of the millions whom the newspapers serve, that their lives and those of their children, to say nothing of their goods and their money, are at stake in these contentions.

Some day the live coal behind the thought,
Whether from God's pure altar brought,
Or from Baal's stone obscene,
Bursts up in flame—the war of tongue and pen
Learns with what deadly purpose it was fraught,
And helpless in the fiery passion caught
Shakes all the pillared state with shock of men.

BOOK VII

THE IDEAS OF THE PUBLIC MAN

CHAPTER XXVII

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Religion and Politics—The Divine Command and its Rejection—Prophet and Politician—Examples from Isaiah—Greek and Roman Thought—Christian Ideals—The Holy Roman Empire—The Machiavellian Reaction—Moral and Physical Forces—Science and Machiavelli—Prussianism—Right and Wrong—The Historical Judgment—The Greatness of Man.

I

MUCH that has gone before relates only to the mechanics of politics and applies equally to men of all opinions. Yet at the end it is brought home to us that the influence of the public man and his power of impressing his fellow-citizens will depend on his thoughts and his general attitude towards human life and destiny. What does he conceive to be the purpose of government and of his own part of it? The question has been asked in all ages and the attempt to answer it has taken both philosophers and statesmen into very deep waters. Yet it must be asked again by each generation, and it may not be out of place at the close of this study to attempt a brief survey of some of the ideas which contribute to the answer.

In the beginning religion and politics are one, and they have been indissolubly bound up with each other throughout history and sometimes to the confusion of both. "Who will rid me of this priest?" is a question which rings through the ages, and "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees" the retort that comes from prophet, priest and monk. Ecclesiastical politicians are a byword to the laity, and the opinion is general that churches are far more likely to be contaminated than politics to be purified by a mingling of the two. Yet the greatest political messages have been delivered to the world by the men of religion, and the politician misses half his vocation if he

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cannot help to keep the soul alive. But this he can in nowise do, unless at the back of his mind he has a theory of the world order and of the sanctions of human conduct which is in some sense religious. Without this he may be a skilful debater or a cunning political strategist, but he will not cheer the spirits or warm the hearts of his fellow-men.

2

The Jewish state is the clearest example in history of the identification of politics and religion. Throughout the Old Testament narrative, political error is constantly presented to us as a falling away from Jehovah, and its consequences as His judgments upon a faithless people. This is no vague and generalized belief; it is asserted definitely as a fact at all emergencies in the national history, and the prophets and sages who fill the part of political reformers claim boldly to be the spokesmen of God. Their writings, therefore, furnish the highest examples of the political message thrown into religious form.

Consider the opening scene in the Book of Isaiah in which the prophet announces his message "concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Judah at this moment is called upon to take a political decision of the highest importance. She is hard pressed by her foes—the Syrians attacking her on the east while Pekah and Rezin threaten her in the north—and Ahaz, her feeble and superstitious king, has been driven back to his capital and is trembling in his palace. The rumour goes abroad that Ephraim is about to join forces with the Syrians to destroy the Davidic dynasty, and that a certain "Son of Tabeel" has already been selected to supplant Ahaz. "And it was told in the house of David, saying Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart [the king's] was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Filled with panic Ahaz throws himself on the protection of Assyria, and dispatches an embassy to that country laden with the treasures of the palace and the temple, to announce that the King of Judah regards himself as "the

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servant and the son " of Tiglath-Pileser. The Assyrian sees his chance, sets his army in motion, captures Damascus, disperses the confederacy and receives the homage of Ahaz in the captured city.¹

To Isaiah the whole transaction was humiliating folly. In order to escape the lesser danger of the Northern Confederacy Ahaz had thrown himself into the jaws of the devouring Assyrian and reduced his people to an ignominious servitude, whereas he had only to stand firm, and Tiglath-Pileser must in his own interests have dealt with Pekah and Rezin and saved Judah without exacting submission or any other price for that service. Between the lines of his prophecy we may trace a political thesis such as a modern statesman might have developed from his place in Parliament in secular language. But to Isaiah it is charged through and through with religious issues. Where the modern statesman would impute weakness and lack of patriotism, he finds a betrayal of Jehovah by his chosen people. The defection is not merely the surrender of the abject king but the climax of the corruption, the evil living, the oppression of the poor, which have brought judgment in their wake. Scorn and denunciation pour from him, and he testifies in the name of the Most High :—

What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts. . . . Thy men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.²

All through this tremendous book we see politics and religion blended in a chain of imperatives which are self-evident and compelling to the prophet. Isaiah is not solitary among politicians or prophets in his absolute conviction that he is right, but his appeal to the inner witness lends power and terror to his words. When his counsel is rejected, he is unmoved and passes into opposi-

¹ Modern archæology has revised certain of the details in this story, but without touching the essentials that concern Isaiah. See "History of Assyria," by Prof. A. T. Olmstead, pp. 195 *et seq.* Robertson Smith's chronology and arrangement are followed in this chapter.

² Isaiah iii, 15, 25, 26.

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tion—as a modern politician might say—with a magnificent gesture of defiance and contempt :—

For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy ; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself ; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary ; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. . . . Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.¹

Thirty years pass : Sargon has succeeded to the throne of Nineveh, and he in his turn been succeeded by his son Sennacherib. Then a new crisis arises. In a few months Babylon is in revolt and Merodach Baladan, the Chaldean usurper, overthrows the Assyrian vassal king and casts off the yoke of Nineveh. After this he sets to work to gain allies from the discontented western vassals of Assyria and sends an embassy to Hezekiah, who is now on the throne of Judah. Hezekiah vacillates, but is greatly tempted and waits only for an assurance of Egyptian aid to join the neighbouring Philistines in a rally to Merodach Baladan's standard. Then once more Isaiah appears on the scene, affirming his old policy of splendid isolation. To Hezekiah he says as he said formerly to Ahaz, "Have none of these alliances, confederacies and foreign entanglements. Stand alone in your strength, and trust in Jehovah." To Palestine as a whole, he also gives the shrewd counsel not to believe that the power of Assyria is broken because Sargon is dead, for Sennacherib may be worse than his father :—

Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken ; for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. Let then the answer to the ambassadors from Nineveh be that the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.²

¹ Isaiah viii, 11-14, 16, 17.

² Isaiah xiv, 29, 32.

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It is not my purpose to follow this history to its conclusion, but these passages may be taken as supreme examples of a political argument thrown into religious terms. To the prophet every act of national policy is a choice between Jehovah and his enemies, and the various shifts and compromises by which practical politicians keep their balance in an imperfect world are a betrayal of the Most High who demands their unqualified allegiance. Isaiah's appeal is not to individuals, but to the nation as a whole. It is in fact the unique contribution of Judaism to political thought that it conceives of the whole nation in its national organization as the religious unit and requires us to think not of the faith and obedience of individual persons, but of the faith and obedience of a nation as expressed in the functions of national life.¹ This point of view brings all public affairs to the test of an absolute right and wrong, and for this reason all the fervent moralists of the Christian period from Savonarola to John Bright have in their hours of exaltation gone back to the Old Testament.

3

Leaving the Jewish theocracy, let me glance at some characteristic ideas of right and wrong in subsequent history.

The idea of allegiance to a righteous God finds no place in Greek and Roman thought, which draws its inspiration from pride and patriotism and the claims of the city-state or empire. It is true that the oracles are consulted and sacrifices offered to the national or tutelary deities when the nation makes war, but these observances are more intended to impress the multitude than taken seriously by intelligent men who control policy. There is little that is specifically religious in the reverence of the Greek for the Greek ideal. He believes not in an exceptional holiness, but in a special culture which makes him superior to other men, and even places them outside the pale of the civilized

¹ See on this subject Robertson Smith, "The Prophets of Israel and their Place in History," p. 21.

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world, as he conceives it. I do not of course mean that moral ideas were excluded from the thoughts of Greeks or Romans about public affairs. It is impossible to read Greek literature without finding in it the pervading sense of a Nemesis which waits on wrong-doing, or Roman without discovering a deep ethical disgust at the corruptions of morals and statecraft. The terrible Melian dialogue in Thucydides seems to invest the whole history of the Peloponnesian war in an atmosphere of wrong bringing retribution. The great *Regulus* ode of Horace is one of the sublimest hymns to the moral hero. Tacitus and Juvenal scorch with their sense of outraged morality. It is nevertheless true to say that both Greek and Roman conceived politics as a secular pursuit of which the interests of their own states were the governing criteria, and that both of them regarded the non-Greek or non-Roman world as without rights against themselves. The most enlightened minds among them appeared never to question that conquest, slavery, or death in the arena were justly appointed for the barbarian. Aristotle speaks of Greeks as in a state of natural war with barbarians.

Then Christianity comes upon the scene, and in its wake the dual conception of a world monarchy and a world religion. The lamp is held high in the theory of the Holy Roman Empire. It is, as Bryce says, "under the emblem of soul and body that the relation of the papal and imperial power is presented to us throughout the middle ages. The Pope, as God's vicar in matters spiritual, is to lead men to eternal life ; the Emperor, as vicar in matters temporal, must so control them in their dealings with one another that they may be able to pursue undisturbed the spiritual life, and thereby attain the same supreme and common end of everlasting happiness. Thus the Holy Roman Church and the Holy Roman Empire are one and the same thing seen from different sides ; and Catholicism, the principle of the universal Christian society, is also Romanism ; that is, rests upon Rome as the origin and type of its universalism ; manifesting itself in a mystic dualism which corresponds to the two natures of its Founder.

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As divine and eternal its head is the Pope, to whom souls have been entrusted ; as human and temporal, the Emperor, commissioned to rule men's bodies and acts." ¹

According to the modern sarcasm, the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, Roman, nor an empire. "At no time in the world's history," says the authority just quoted, "has theory, professing all the time to control practice, been so utterly divorced from it. Ferocious and sensual, that age worshipped humility and asceticism ; there has never been a purer ideal of love nor a grosser profligacy of life." Yet we must not let the depravity of the "Vicars," whether temporal or spiritual, or the fierce passions, political and dogmatic, which made them alternately the slaves of each other and the instruments of each other's ambitions and ruthless persecutions, blind us to the profound influence of this theory. Again and again it was reasserted by the great Popes : Hildebrand, Alexander II, Innocent III, Gregory the Great ; and Dante revived it in his vision of a monarchy of the world, a reign of peace and Christian brotherhood, to be realized paradoxically by the exclusion of the Papacy from the sphere of secular government. In some sort the theory of the Holy Roman Empire kept alive the idea of a Christian society transcending national boundaries, to which all men owed duty and chivalry, an idea deeply stained by the cruelties of fanatics and bigots, but still on the whole exerting a great civilizing influence.

4

To the cynical minds of the Renaissance the gulf between profession and practice was beyond bridging, and among the liberties they claimed was that of asserting the true state of the facts. Machiavelli did not invent, he merely described and formularized the maxims of statecraft as practised in Italy for full two centuries before his time. They are in effect a denial that religious or private conceptions of right and wrong have anything to do with the government of states or their relations with each other.

¹ "The Holy Roman Empire," Bryce, 1904 edition, pp. 103-5.

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The first duty of "the Prince" and his highest morality is to guard his own position against either internal enemies or external foes. For this purpose he may use all weapons, force and fraud, openly or secretly. He may dupe the great majority who have no understanding, but if duping fails, he must coerce them. If the rest cannot with certainty be made friends, he must put it out of their power to be enemies. It is better for him to be feared than loved, for love depends on others who are fickle, timid and ungrateful, whereas fear is in his own hands. On the whole it is better for a wise Government to make the people content and to manage the nobles, but since good actions are as liable to incur hatred as bad ones, there will come occasions when it must not shrink from wickedness to maintain its power. The path of rectitude may prove to be the best policy, but if circumstances require us to deviate from it, there should be no hesitation. A prince is not required to keep his word to his own undoing; he has constantly to bear in mind that the memory of injuries is stronger than gratitude for new favours; that as between taking life and confiscating property, the survivors easily forget the former, but not the latter; and that when cruelties become advisable then they should be committed thoroughly and but once, since it is highly impolitic to have resort to them a second time. Thus when the chance comes, the greatest pains should be taken to extinguish completely the family of a rival or conquered sovereign, since history has again and again proved that the most dangerous consequences may follow from the escape of some seemingly obscure and insignificant member.

It is possible that a touch of irony enters into some of these maxims, but the world has taken them seriously as the definite formularization of the devil's creed. Whatever may be said in mitigation of this popular view, the significance of Machiavelli is that he did definitely pose for the world a view of statecraft which rails it off from the everyday morality of private life and makes the good of the State and its power and permanence objects justifying acts which would be execrable if perpetrated by individuals

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for their own ends. If his doctrine is to be understood, it must be set not against the modern idea of humane statesmanship, but against the current ecclesiastical view which habitually attributed events to the miraculous and arbitrary intervention of the Deity or the saints. He appeals to men of intelligence to face the facts, to form a just estimate of the real motives of human conduct, and shape their action consciously upon these realities instead of upon the sentiments and superstitions of the vulgar. There is a germ of sociology as well as a ruthless exposure of human nature in his doctrine, and the inhuman cynicism of it is at least in one aspect a protest against hypocrisy. This is really, he seems to say, how clear-sighted men do act, in governing their fellow-men, therefore let us not pretend about it, but rather seek to discover the rules of this difficult art, so that it may be practised successfully, and with the least risk to those who pursue it.

The question which Machiavelli posed remains unsettled to this hour, and Europe passed into the Great War debating it. Considerable parts of the German War Book read like a modern parody of "the Prince." But with the possible exception of Frederick the Great no conqueror from that time to this has ventured to go to war proclaiming his intention to increase his power or seize coveted territory; and nearly all have thought it necessary to pretend some kind of altruistic motive: religion, humanity or the stern necessity of self-defence against encroaching enemies. Napoleon said that the moral forces were as two to one compared with the physical, by which he meant that the mass of men require to be convinced that they are acting in a righteous or patriotic cause before they can be relied upon to develop the martial virtues. In all the confused struggle of the Thirty Years War the religious motive predominates. Gustavus Adolphus proclaims that he has come to "rescue his brethren in faith from the oppressions they were suffering for conscience' sake"¹; devout Catholics are horrified when the vacillating Pope, Urban

¹ Letter to the town of Schweinfurt, quoted by von Ranke, "History of the Popes," Vol. II, 309.

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VIII, appears indifferent to the fate of his flock. "Amidst the conflagrations of Churches and Monasteries the Pope" they protested, "stands cold and rigid as ice." "The King of Sweden has more zeal for his Lutheranism than the holy father for the only true and Catholic faith."¹ Emperors and statesmen may secretly have consoled themselves with the doctrines of "the Prince," or taken a cynical pleasure at their own success in kindling the multitude to a righteous indignation, but the mass of ordinary humanity, it was evident, could not be moved to effort and self-sacrifice except by a definite belief that right and wrong, or religion were at stake. Religion has in consequence borne the burden of a great many massacres and persecutions that were in fact political.

There is no need to labour the point ; all history bears witness to it. Humanity in the mass is ineradicably moral, and, whatever their private beliefs may be, kings and statesmen must at least pretend to be on the side of right against wrong. But from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the doctrines of Machiavelli have been transformed in a subtle way under the influence of science. We now begin to get the conception of a biological "right" which is beyond the good and evil of the moral law. The Darwinian principle is now called in aid to justify the strong in asserting themselves over the weak, and war for any cause or no cause is declared to be "God's terrible medicine for humanity," a thing self-justified for its purging and eliminating results, the accepted way of nature or Providence for "the survival of the fittest." "A good war sanctifies any cause," cries Nietzsche, and to prepare for war in good or bad cause, provided it is likely to increase the power of the State, is declared to be the supreme duty of statesmen. This doctrine joining hands with Machiavellian conceptions of statecraft has given us the thing we know as "Prussianism," though the name must by no means be taken to imply that it is confined to one nation or race.

If the world is capable of learning from experience, Prussianism should be doomed not merely by the moral

¹ "History of the Popes," von Ranke. Vol. II, 311.

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nausea it creates, but by the proof abundantly offered that war under modern conditions is not the selective and eliminating process that the Prussian theorist assumes, but an indiscriminate slaughter in which the fit are least likely to survive. The pursuance of this road leads, it is more and more evident, to suicide. A lingering belief remains that, though as between individuals the process may be blind and indiscriminate, yet that as between nations it may still have the selective virtue claimed for it. But when the conflict is between immense groups, there is no guarantee that the physically fittest may not be wiped out by combinations against them or that modern lethal weapons may not presently enable the weakest nations at a comparatively small expenditure to inflict mortal wounds on the strongest. A little nation which chose to devote its energies wholeheartedly to the manufacture of aeroplanes and poison gases might make itself as formidable to its greater neighbours as they are to one another. The militarist philosophers who are unamenable to arguments from humanity must, I think, come in time to perceive that their notions of the ordeal by battle are as antiquated as the mediæval notions of ordeal by fire or water.

The public man then is on safe ground when he boldly applies the simple ideas of right and wrong to the affairs of nations. He may easily be mistaken in his judgment of what is right and wrong, but if he denies that there is a right and wrong above expediency and self-interest, he has no other foothold. The public life becomes meaningless and statesmanship a vain thing, unless it is boldly assumed that man is in some sort master of his fate and can control events to ends that may be called righteous.

It would nevertheless be a gross presumption to suppose that great affairs can be reduced to the code of the household or be explained in the simple terms that we apply to our individual lives. When we are so often uncertain as to our own motives, how can we expect to be sure about the innumerable factors—historical and actual, instinctive and religious, economic and political—which enter into the policy of nations, and drive them not seldom to acts which

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seem irrational and suicidal, and which no cool and thinking brain among them could even pretend to approve on its merits? We say habitually, and wisely, that the judgment of great events must be passed over to history, by which we mean that justice can only be done, and the true springs of action revealed by those who have seen the results and perhaps reaped the fruits of what was done by their forbears, who are removed from the passions of the moment and have knowledge which was hidden from the wise and prudent in the hour of action. This perpetual reference to the judgment of the future is in itself a confession of political infirmity, and the historical verdict, when given, seems often to justify the deepest misgivings about the range of human will and capacity. Looking back we see physical causes at work, such as the pressure of population on subsistence, gradual but momentous changes in the trade routes of the world, physiographical changes, driving men and nations to courses of which their own explanations are manifestly untrue. To fall back on an interpretation which absolves all political criminals and empties the idea of statesmanship of all meaning is a constant temptation from which some escape by flying to religious mysticism¹ and others by burying themselves in practical affairs.

A certain agnosticism is inevitable and right. For any generation of the short-lived to suppose that it can interpret the whole story of man and his destiny would be presumptuous folly. But if in the seeming welter of human

¹ A famous sentence from Newman's "Apologia" impressively conveys this mood: "To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments and forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken, of a superintendent design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, 'having no hope and without God in the world'—all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution."—"Apologia," 1st edition, p. 377-8.

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affairs, it is impossible to disengage the moral from the physical, or to believe that the mind under conscious control is one element in the mysterious evolution of things, statesmanship is an imposture, and we may as well yield ourselves unresistingly to the stream of tendency, whatever that may be. The belief in mind under conscious control is thus at the end of it all the minimum of faith required of the public man ; and respect for his material, which is human kind, the first condition that must be required of him :

πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοῦδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει

* * *

παντοπόρος ἄπορος ἐπ' οὐδὲν ἔρχεται
τὸ μέλλον. "Αἶδα μόνον φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται
νοσῶν δ' ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς ξνμπέφρασται.
σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὕπερ ἐλπιδ' ἔχων
ποτὲ μὲν κακὸν, ἄλλοτ' ἐπ' ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει.¹

This vision of man in his unceasing struggle with nature and circumstance—the vision of his patience, his courage and his unconquerable mind—can never be absent from those who presume to serve him. He is pathetically at their mercy. They may lead him to the heights or plunge him to the depths ; kindle in him the purest flames of self-sacrifice or the basest passions of greed and envy. Man, as history presents him to us, is patient, loyal, long-suffering, and pathetically submissive to his rulers and preceptors. He goes cheerfully to the death when he deems that duty calls, wastes his heroism in the service of poltroons, and gives his all without a murmur for the lost cause that has touched his heart. The statesman is in the service of this high, chivalrous, religious being, and unless he can conceive himself as on the side of good against evil and right against wrong, he is as much out of place as the unbeliever in the sanctuary.

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 332 *et seq.*, " Many are the wonders of the world, And none so wonderful as Man. . . . All fertile in resource, resourceless never Meets he the morrow ; only death He wants the skill to shun : But many a fell disease the healer's art hath foiled. So soaring far past hope, The wide inventiveness of man Finds diverse issues good and ill."—Whitelaw's translation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

INTERNATIONAL MORALITY

The Problem of International Morality—A Parallelogram of Forces and its Collapse—War and Policy—An Immoral Maxim and its Consequences—A Dangerous Profession—The Upper-crust Morality and the Subconscious Forces—The Two Wisdoms—Nature's Method and How it Works—An Example from the North-West Frontier—Fatalism and Statesmanship—The Responsibility of the Statesman—The Politician's Choice.

I CAN imagine its being said that the generalizations in the previous chapter are trite and not very helpful. It carries the statesman a very little way to be told that he is in the service of man or that he must acknowledge the distinctions between right and wrong. How shall he apply these maxims? Shall the virtuous man be his model, can he find safety and discharge his trust by endeavouring to practise on a great scale the golden rule and the law of forbearance and charity which the Christian may endeavour to pursue in his own home and among his neighbours? The preacher in his pulpit is bound to say that this is the only way, but worldlings and practical politicians are nearly unanimous that to follow it is ruin, and the preacher himself generally forgets his own doctrine when the war drums begin to throb.

Let me try, then, to get a little nearer this problem even at the risk of going back on what has gone before. Whether the nations are as yet capable of absorbing the simpler maxims of the common morality into a code governing their dealings with each other is the greatest of the problems presented to this generation. It is in a sense the oldest problem in the world, yet it comes in a new guise to these times, since the penalties of failure to solve it are beyond anything that previous generations have conceived. The

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Great War was the climax and catastrophe of the most highly organized distribution of political power the world has ever seen. So far as was possible, the statesmen of this period had reduced international dealing to a science from which the common morality was excluded. Between them they constructed a parallelogram of forces in which the opposing thrusts and stresses had been nicely calculated to neutralize each other. But the immense weight which was being thrown upon this structure and the kind of catastrophe which must follow, if it lost equilibrium, was either not in their minds or ruled out of their calculations, since any attempt to correct their own handiwork was as likely as not to bring it crashing to the ground. In this world of balanced forces the pacifist may be as dangerous as the militarist, and an attempt to enforce peace prove as destructive in its results as the deliberate making of war.

It is safe to say that this structure would never have been built if its original architects could have conceived its ruin. They had in their minds the relatively small catastrophes, the short and decisive wars between one nation and another, with the others keeping the ring, which were a bracing experience for the conquerors and not a fatal one to the conquered. Montesquieu's saying that nations should help each other as much as possible in peace, and do each other as little harm as possible in war, is a fair example of the old European idea of war. Even modern militarism was founded on the experience of Bismarck, who with remarkable cunning and foresight had planned and carried to complete success a linked series of wars in which he had taken his enemies in detail and carried his points with comparatively little effort and sacrifice. When the Kaiser protested in 1916 that he had not "willed the war," he was well justified. He certainly had not willed the Great War; what he or a considerable number of his countrymen had willed was an entirely different sort of war—a war on the Bismarckian model in which Germany would have taken her enemies off their guard and enforced her will as she did in 1866 or 1871. In this way only can war be made to conform to Clausewitz's definition of it as

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a continuation of policy, a definition which assumes that the war-maker will also be the victor. It is difficult to believe that this idea will survive the demonstration which the Great War gave us of the incalculable perils and devastating results of modern warfare. In November 1918 all the belligerents found themselves in positions which none of them dreamt of in 1914, and which were beyond intelligent handling by victors or vanquished. Absolutely to reverse the formula of Clausewitz, and to think of war as the ruin of policy and the quite likely destruction of any civilization that makes policy worth while, is, on the face of it, a necessity which is imposed on statesmen by the coldest consideration of the facts.

The vice of Clausewitz's definition was that it governed policy as well as war. While war is conceived as a continuation of policy, policy will be conceived as a preparation for war, and the secrecy and fraud which are held to be justified in war will inevitably be practised in the intervals between wars. In a world preparing for war, the potential belligerents cannot inform each other of their preparations, of their arrangements with their allies, of the marches they are stealing upon one another in their dealings with the smaller nations which hold strategical positions of importance in an expected war. Diplomacy in such circumstances must be a constant effort to conceal facts, and the statesman who exposes his countrymen to the risk of defeat by his lack of skill in this art may justly be held to have failed in his duty. It is idle to complain that morality is ignored when the world is organized on fundamentally immoral principles. It is of necessity ignored, and its unseasonable intrusion may be a highly dangerous thing. In such conditions, all the values must in Nietzsche's language be transvaluated. It is not virtue, but weakness, to be merciful to an enemy who may presently avenge himself by wiping out your capital and killing your population by the scores of thousands. It is not honour but folly and cowardice which permits a scrap of paper to stand between you and a piece of territory which may be vital to your existence. *Salus patriae suprema lex*, and when your country is in danger

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there is no other law, so long as these postulates are accepted. In this world the golden rule is of necessity excluded.

The Prussian code so much execrated by the other belligerents in the Great War, was, in fact, no gratuitous defection from humane standards, but the logical result of the system which had grown up in Europe in the fifty years before the war. And we deceive ourselves if we suppose that we can maintain the system and humanize the code. The tendency will be rather in the other direction. In proportion as the world comes to realize the full meaning of the scientific horrors that are in store for it, if war must be reckoned with as a probability, the safety of each country will more and more tend to become an absolute standard for its statesmen, excluding consideration for its neighbours, except in so far as they can be drawn into its defensive schemes, and overriding treaties when they interfere with what it deems to be its security. There is no piecemeal criticism of this system possible. We cannot maintain one part of it and condemn the rest. Under stress of circumstances we have already abandoned the idea of humanizing war by conditions which limit its destructiveness ; and if unlimited war is the prospect ahead of us, it is idle to suppose that we can humanize diplomacy. Not the good of the world or humanity, but the protection of his own country and its women and children from the threatened extremities of torture and suffering must be the first consideration of the statesman. In a world so organized there is no room for altruism between nations. Righteousness, like charity, will begin at home—and stay there.

2

This is the conclusion to which the profoundly unmoral trend of European policy in the scientific age inevitably leads, and no man setting out on public life in these times can shut his eyes to it if he is serious-minded. His profession is attended with enormous risks ; the material he handles may turn suddenly into violent explosives spreading

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death and havoc over a continent ; his delicate diplomatic hands may be bathed in blood before he knows what he is doing. With this vast liability hanging over him the joys of the political career, and the zest in the struggle for fame and place may well take on a rather soberer hue. Yet no statesmen of any generation have ever had presented to them questions of profounder interest and importance than those which await the generation which is now coming into public affairs, and it is well that they should measure these carefully and be aware of their difficulty.

All questions are necessarily simplified for the purposes of political propaganda and it is natural that the propagandists of peace should regard themselves as angels of light and their opponents as emissaries from the Evil One. And if we were concerned only with the world of reason and conscious morality, in which the good citizen and father of the family spends nine-tenths of his working life, this classification would be exhaustive. In that world the maker of war, the slayer, the incendiary, is an acknowledged public enemy, and society is in league to put him down. But the world which the international statesman has to deal with is swayed by a thousand obscure instincts and impulses of which the individual is only partly conscious, which he often interprets wrongly, and which in any case are stubborn material for the homespun moralist. As we look back, we see an incessant conflict going forward between the upper-crust morality which pleads for reason and civilization, and the subconscious forces which govern the struggle for existence. We see statesmen throwing themselves alternately on the one side and the other, now appealing to the herd instincts of the subconscious mind, now pleading manfully for the peace and mercy of the brotherhood. It is idle to conclude that this struggle will not continue simply because one generation has learnt its lesson. With all the temperate zones filled up, with the new countries more and more shutting their sluices against the European overflow, and millions of unemployed appearing on the scene whenever the trade cycle reaches its nadir, the subterranean movements must remain for-

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midable, and the problem of subduing them to peace and reason be one of the greatest perplexity.

To regard it merely as a problem of war and peace is obviously to take too narrow a view of it. It is a problem of world order and organization, the discovery of some conscious and rational process which will keep the physical and animal part of the human struggle within bounds and yet give the virile and expanding races their place in the sun. The idea that any authority or any treaty can stereotype a particular *status quo* and guarantee for all time that one race, which may be decadent or dwindling, shall enjoy a certain territory, and that another race which may be virile and expanding shall not exceed a certain boundary is, so far as one dare use such language, contrary to the nature of things. The solution, whatever it may be, must be elastic and dynamic and give reasonable play to natural forces which, though we may hope them to be gradual and peaceful, will yet dominate the human scene.

3

I can imagine at this point the objection being put in that such an adjustment is in fact impossible, and that no rational and intellectual process can ever be devised which will bring the physical forces under control or be a substitute for their deep subconscious wisdom and rightness. At this point the disputants change sides, and the champion of the physical forces boldly claims that the eternal verities and moralities, the decrees of God and Providence, are with him and not with the dreamers and visionaries who would substitute their own wisdom for that of the Eternal.

This, fundamentally, is the question which lies at the root of all human endeavour, the question of the two wisdoms, the "natural" and the ethical, the process of "nature" and the process of civilization. To give "nature" right is to make a mockery of statesmanship; to exalt statesmanship above nature is to ensure its downfall. Philosophy says that the opposition is a false one, and declares "nature" and statesmanship, the instinctive

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and the rational, to be all one process informed by the same mind and purpose. This is and must remain the working creed of the public man.

But a word more may be said about the position of those who champion the physical forces in the present stage of the world's history.

They conceive of the human drama as the play of "natural forces" for the survival of the fittest. Let me take as a simplified example of that process the actual or very nearly actual experience of certain tribes inhabiting the savage and barren regions of the North-west frontier of India. Their population always tends to rise a little beyond the food supply that can be raised from the stony soil. To keep it within bounds "nature" has devised the ingenious system of the vendetta. The tribes wage a perpetual warfare against each other, alleging as pretexts some real or fancied wrong, generally, as in most ancient sagas, the killing or kidnapping of a woman of one tribe by a member of another tribe. At the beginning they fight with their hands or with clubs and stones, and on the whole it may be said that the fittest or at least the most muscular survive. Then "civilization" advances and a supply of flint-lock muskets dribbles through to the tribes from more advanced countries. Those who are happy enough to get them first have a great advantage and proceed to wipe out a rival tribe. It may still perhaps in some sort be said that the fitter survive. The tribe which obtained the muskets showed itself intelligent and alert, and in using the muskets developed a skill of eye and hand which made it evidently superior to the exterminated tribe. A few years pass and there comes into the valley a consignment of Martini-Henry rifles which by some accident is pretty evenly distributed among all the tribes. These kill at 2,000 yards and are very indiscriminate in their choice of fit and unfit. The tribes have now to retire into fortified villages which face each other across the valley and turn the space between them into a field of fire. The area of cultivation and therefore the available food supply is thus very much diminished, and it becomes more important than ever that

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the fit shall be few. But "nature" again is equal to the emergency, and by and by there arrive the Lee-Metford, the Enfield, or some still more modern weapon which kills at 5,000 yards, and so the balance is adjusted. Fourteen years ago I drove (with an escort) through a valley where this "natural process" was in full operation, and the British officers accompanying me observed that if the Government of India would smuggle in a few machine-guns, the tribes would now exterminate each other and complete the story of "survival."

This under modern conditions is the "natural" process of the struggle for existence, and when, four years later, I looked down on the scene at Verdun, I thought of that valley on the North-west frontier. "Nature" provides not only the perfect body, the keen eye, and the taut muscle, but the high explosive and the poison gas; and if she cannot be controlled or prevented from using her own weapons for the destruction of her children, she will end by exterminating them. This is what Lord Grey meant when he said at the end of the Great War that the nations must "learn or perish." The gloomy speculation which suggests that the part of "nature" which we call "science" has so far outstripped the part which we call rational and humane, that we must look to the first for security and abandon the second as a vain dream is probably a sentence of death for our present civilization and the ruin of all its politics.

Therefore, to whatever school of politics he may belong, a man entering public life in these times must take an inward vow to resist the fatalism which leads to this conclusion. His presumption must be that the "natural" process is within control, and that man is to this extent master of his fate.

4

That is the first article in what without cant may be called the *religio politici*. The practical consequences which follow must be left for each man to determine for himself, but conscientious men will have a new sense of the

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tremendous forces they are dealing with or may set in motion. They will not talk in the same light-hearted way of war as they might have done twelve years ago, or treat it as an inevitable incident or risk of national policy. They will be careful about stirring the national passions and jealousies of the crowd and, when they praise the warlike virtues, remember the millions of graves that are the cost of their display. Above all they will not speak of the "League of Nations" as an amiable dream or fall back on the theory of an unchangeable human nature as a pretext for lukewarmness in its service. It is a gross presumption for the children of the hour to set terms to the possibilities of human nature or to conclude that it will be eternally involved in a mutually destructive struggle between its best instincts and its worst. In the brief period of time that we know, there have been swift and amazing changes in the contents of human experience. The statesman who came into affairs to-day with the bundle of suppositions that served his predecessors fifty years ago would find himself in a world undreamt of—the great military empires gone, the map redrawn, revolutionaries and dictators challenging the most ancient institutions, a new and malignant science preparing methods of warfare which require all the forms of diplomacy and policy to be radically changed if they are not to prove utterly destructive. On the other hand, immeasurable possibilities of solving some of the greater problems by a beneficent science which may ease human labour and enable men to lead a tolerable life without exterminating each other. The herd struggling blindly for self-preservation, the community co-operating for material aid—these are broadly the alternatives which are offered to the human race with increasing penalties for the wrong choice, since the struggle of the herd is fast being raised to an efficient ferocity which must be fatal to the "brotherhood." The compromise which has enabled the nations to halt between the two, practising a limited warfare between the periods of peace, and picking up the threads and proceeding as before after the interval of fighting, is not likely to continue long into the future. For the politician

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the choice between right and wrong is that between the herd and the community. He may combine all manner of opinions with either choice, but he cannot serve the two masters. He cannot, if he is a Conservative, stir up the jingo mob, or if he is a Radical appeal to the cupidity of the multitude without making himself the servant of the herd and setting in motion brute passions which may be wholly beyond his control. His is the art of man in community, and if that fails, he had better make way for the military dictator or other ruthless exponent of scientific warfare who will do the business of the herd with far greater efficiency than he can.

The complaint of the men at arms that the politicians obstruct their business is likely to be more and more justified, if the pursuit of war continues to be a national industry with the principal nations. Nothing in truth is less adapted to the fearful hazards of that industry, as it is now organized, or less likely to carry a country safely through them than politics as practised in most European countries, including our own. The world of force and the world of law have each their own logic and their own conceptions of right and wrong. As human society is constituted to-day, they cross and stultify each other and prevent either from being effective on its own plane. The men of peace complain that the men of war will not let the world have peace ; the latter retort that the men of peace will not let them make war effectively. Both are right, and the choice between them will, so far as we can foresee, be the governing question of the next phase of human history.

CHAPTER XXIX

WEALTH AND THE GOOD LIFE

The Question of Wealth—A Disastrous Fallacy—Bolshevist and Capitalist Illusions—The French Treasure-hunt—Taxation and its Problems—The Political Bee-keeper—A Socialist Machiavelli—The Question of Values—A Creative Evolution—The Idle Rich and the Deserving Middle-class—A Thought for the Workers—A Chance for the State.

I

POLITICAL questions may be grouped for convenience into those which concern war and peace, and those which concern wealth. Having considered the first, let me pass to the second of these things. The word "wealth" covers, I suppose, three-fourths of the subject matter with which most public men have to deal. The eternal argument between wealth and poverty continues unceasingly in domestic politics ; the search for wealth is a chief cause of the rivalry between nations. Yet, if we may judge from recent events there is no word in the language whose definition is more in doubt and none which covers more fatal ambiguities in practical politics.

The convenient but immensely fallacious habit of measuring wealth in money is at the root of the trouble. Because pounds, dollars, francs and marks can be taken from one man who possesses them and divided among his neighbours who are without them, it is assumed that this process can be continued indefinitely with the innumerable things that are measured in pounds, dollars, francs and marks. The truth, it need hardly be said, is that most of these are by their nature incapable of being realized or divided. An immense part of what is reckoned as wealth in modern states exists only in the region of ideas and could not be redistributed in any forcible way without being destroyed. This wealth is simply a lien on the future,

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the value of which at any given moment is an almost mystical complex of hope and fear, and depends wholly on the assumption that the economic system under which it was created will continue. The plant of industry may be transferred from one owner to another, but its value consists in its earning capacity in competent hands, and of itself it represents no wealth which could be divided.

These are commonplaces which I suppose would be admitted by most instructed people, but politicians seem perpetually to be taken by surprise when they turn out to be true. It was apparently an immense surprise to the Russian Communists to discover that when they had destroyed the capitalists, most of their capital had vanished, and that there remained nothing to divide but what the capitalist, so to speak, stood up in, his clothes, his jewels, his motor-cars, his palaces, his stock of raw material—all very unsuitable things for a starving multitude to digest. Equally surprising, the plant of industry when it survived, refused to run itself, and required competent hands and brains to make it produce goods. These, it will be said, are characteristic illusions of Bolsheviks which every competent person who is not a Bolshevik knows to be absurd. But this is by no means the case. When M. Poincaré went into the Ruhr, he was endeavouring, as I have already pointed out in an earlier chapter, to practise on Germans exactly what Lenin and Trotsky had practised on the Russian *bourgeoisie*, and he too had to learn by experience that when he had destroyed an industrial system, he had by the same stroke destroyed all the values attaching to it, and extinguished the earning power which was the only kind of wealth available for his purpose of recovering reparations.

The same illusions enter deeply into most arguments about the fiscal question, the currency question, the question of the distribution of wealth, the question of inter-allied debts. The fact that goods are paid for by goods, and that debts can only be paid in the same way, is masked by the form which measures these transactions in money. Because a coin can be transferred from one pocket to another, it

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is assumed that "money" can be paid in the same way by one nation to another. Because a coin retains its face value when its exchange value falls, it is assumed that property measured in money has the same stability. A wealthy Frenchman to whom I explained the methods of taxation in force in this country in 1922 said at once that they were "pure Bolshevism." When I asked him whether he thought it better to sacrifice a third of his income for a few years or to lose half his capital—his rentes and his debentures—as he manifestly had done through the depreciation of the franc, his reply was, "But, sir, the franc is still the franc." So the Germans believed about the mark in the earlier stages of its descent into the abyss. These popular beliefs have enabled Governments by the simple act of inflating their currencies to practise the grossest acts of spoliation and injustice, to ruin whole classes of their subjects, to empty the pockets of creditors for the benefit of debtors, to enrich the least deserving kinds of adventurers at the expense of the thrifty and steady—and to do all this without serious complaint from, and even perhaps at the instigation of, those who suffered from it.

A whole volume might be written on the suffering which has been inflicted on Europe and the desperate expedients to which its Governments, both Capitalist and Revolutionary, have been driven either by an honest confusion of thought on these subjects or by the temptation to play on this confusion in the minds of others. So far as their property is concerned, the German middle-classes have suffered scarcely less at the hands of their bourgeois Government than the Russian *bourgeoisie* at the hands of their revolutionaries. For many months Europe was kept in a seeth of unrest, and its commerce brought to a standstill while France went on a treasure-hunt for rainbow-gold, and found her own wealth dissolving as her dream faded. We are seemingly by no means at the end of this process, for as the Governments which ardently desire German "money" begin to discover that they have to take German goods which may compete with their own manufactures, they can scarcely conceal their alarm. Already we have

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seen some of the newspapers which struck the firmest attitude about German payment falling into a panic about the consequences which will follow when their demands are met. "We don't want your gold, we don't want your goods, we want your money to spend in our own way in our own country," said a quite intelligent man of business to me when I was in America three years ago. This vision of "money to spend in their own way and in their own country," is still widely current in most of the creditor nations, and what sort of reckoning there may be when their peoples discover that it is not to be had, is one of the disturbing thoughts about the future.

Whether it is from their repeated controversies about the fiscal question or from their long experience of foreign trade, the British people seem to have some instinct which saves them from the worst of these confusions. But their statesmen, like those of other countries, have to realize that the whole conception of property has been subtly undermined by the behaviour of Capitalists as well as of Revolutionaries, and by the unceasing shifts of values which have accompanied if not resulted from this behaviour. When Capitalists are seen to be plainly ignorant of the nature of their own system and entertaining beliefs which would be thought childish in Communists, it becomes difficult to take a high line about the laws of political economy. It is nevertheless true that by whatever name these practitioners call themselves, their ignorance of the nature of the material they are dealing with is one of the greatest calamities of these times.

2

No official is under a stronger necessity to understand the nature of wealth than a Chancellor of the Exchequer when he levies taxation. The popular notion that the tax-collector puts his hand into your till and abstracts certain sums of money which you are very reluctant to give up—which is true enough as a description of the final part of the process—commonly but fallaciously governs argument on the whole question. As a matter of fact the greater

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part of the "money" for which the Chancellor of the Exchequer budgets is non-existent when he issues his decrees and what he is actually doing is to require good citizens to earn it for him. This is equally true whether the taxation is "direct" or "indirect," for if the price of tea or sugar goes up owing to taxation, the poor man is in just the same necessity to devote a larger part of his daily toil to the needs of the State as the professional man or the man of business when he pays income-tax. This aspect of taxation is vastly more important for all normal purposes than the occasional seizures of accumulated wealth by super-tax, death-duties or other forms of levy after the event. What a Chancellor of the Exchequer is doing in three-fourths of his operations is not taking money which is there and appropriating it to the needs of the State, but requisitioning a certain part of the brains, energy and skill that go to make up the earning capacity of the nation.

The conditions on which this can be done safely and productively are a combined problem of economics and psychology. Certain means obviously defeat themselves, the means, for example, which M. Poincaré took when he seized the "jugular vein" of Germany in the endeavour to make her pay. The person taxed must somehow or other be induced to remain at work and perhaps even to increase his work, if taxing him is to be productive. Broadly speaking the problem is that of the bee-keeper, how to keep the industrious creature at her business of gathering honey while filching her store; and if only the rich men of business had the bee's admirable instinct for gathering and storing, regardless of the fate of their store, the problem of what is called democratic finance would be enormously simplified. But the rich also defend themselves when attacked, and generally with much success. For they have the same disinclination as the rest of us to work without reward, and in addition a rather uncanny skill, which is their own special gift, in evading their pursuers and making other people suffer when they are caught.

Evidently, then, the notion, which some politicians seem to entertain, that all taxation can be concentrated on

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a small number of rich men, will not work, if the wealth of these men depends in any considerable degree on their own exertions. Whatever may be the respective merits of the Capitalist and Socialist systems, the State cannot reasonably expect to have the benefit of both worlds. It cannot destroy the incentives of Capitalism and yet expect Capitalists to go on producing wealth for the State. In so far as it levels them down, the majority of them will neither have the will nor feel the duty to produce more than their fellow-citizens. There is, I am aware, an argument which is by no means to be disparaged, that in time a new race of producers may come on the scene who will work for the community with the zest of artists and the dutifulness of Civil Servants. Human nature will perhaps one day be capable of this, but a Chancellor of the Exchequer who applied this idea to the taxation of rich men brought up in the Capitalist system and accustomed to its methods of rewarding private enterprise with profit, would, I am afraid, be grievously disappointed.

A Socialist Machiavelli who had carefully studied the subject might write a treatise on the methods which a skilful Government would adopt to relieve the wealthy of their riches while inducing them to continue in the straight path of producing wealth. It would be his object to discover the "saturation point," i.e. the point at which increases of taxation cease to be productive, and endeavour to advance it gradually by means of which, at any given moment, the taxpayer would be unaware. Thus by gradualness, as Mr. Webb would say, the rich man might be induced to accept lower emoluments, without abating his energy, provided these emoluments were still in advance of those earned by his less-gifted or less acquisitive fellows. At each step it would be necessary to take the utmost care not to reach the point at which he would really think it not worth while to go on, and to take the right measure of his protests, which would of course be loud and violent, long before it was reached. If this point is reached and passed, then trouble begins and taxation becomes unproductive. The skilful Chancellor of the Exchequer has therefore

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always to consider how he can persuade the wealthy to co-operate in the process of relieving them of their money.

It is scarcely a paradox to say that in the modern economic state wealth can only be transferred with the consent and co-operation of those who possess it. That consent may be given unwillingly, but in the last resort it must be given, or the result will simply be the extinction of the wealth which it is proposed to transfer. Let it be added, however, that, if this thought is a warning to the democratic financier, it is not, or should not be, an anodyne to the rich, for it is certain that the abuse of wealth and its inordinate accumulation in few hands kindle passions which are reckless of consequences and may seek gratification in destroying without regard to the results. The problem for both parties in this controversy is that of their mutual satisfaction. It is immaterial to the mass of mankind that a few are very rich, if the majority are well-to-do ; there is no safety in riches, if the majority feel themselves to be dispossessed.

3

If we could rule out the idea of wealth as something tangible and solid which can be seized and redistributed like money in a till, we should approach the controversy about material things from a different angle. The Socialist would then perceive that the idea of enriching the many at the expense of the few is mechanically impossible, and the Capitalist would realize that the greater part of his wealth is not the positive and unconditional thing that he commonly thinks it to be but an estimate of values which assumes and depends upon the co-operation of his fellow-citizens. It would then be seen that the main part of the problem concerns not what exists, but what can be brought into existence, and that its solution depends on discovering the terms on which human beings can be induced to work together in producing new and more wealth. Expressed in the simplest language this is a question of "values." If by some miracle we could arrive at a perfectly just and stable valu-

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ation of services and products, the problem would be solved, and it would be immaterial whether the State or private individuals presided over the process of producing, selling, and wage-paying.¹

But a world in which this was possible would have to be in a state either of frozen perfection or of arrested development. The living, striving, evolving world of human beings is, and must be, engaged in a perpetual quest of values. Men and things are for ever being valued and revalued according to circumstances which no one can foresee, states of opinion and education, equally beyond prediction, determining wants and desires at a particular moment. "Property" is constantly vanishing before our eyes; the commodity which a public company produces may be totally superseded in a few years, and its shares be worth no more than last year's snows. New inventions, as undreamt of as the steam-engine in the days of Hadrian, may in fifty years create wealth of which this generation has no conception; changes of taste and manners may throw on the dust-heap a great deal that it holds precious. The idea that Governments can control this process, foresee its issue, or impose their own ideas of value upon the infinite varieties of service and effort that it exacts from individuals is, I believe, chimerical. So long as human beings continue to think of themselves as better or worse than their neighbours, the idea of a unit of value attaching equally to all services will encounter not merely the acquisitive instincts of human kind, but its sense of justice. This is the rock on which Communist experiments have foundered, and there is no prospect of its being blasted away by any violence. The movement of humanity is a creative evolution of genius and the soul which will always assert its own values over those who attempt to dictate to it.

¹ How radical this question of valuation is we see from the plain fact that whenever workmen demand Socialism through the nationalization of railways, mines, or other industries, they demand to stand outside the process and to retain the individualist privilege of valuing their own services through collective bargaining and strikes. It is really a misnomer to speak of those proposals as Socialism. They are merely a substitution of State Capitalism which leaves the greater part of the Socialist problem unsolved. All these proposals might be carried out if it were expedient to do so, without making any material change in the lives of the workers.

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This is by no means to say that the politician stands outside this process or in opposition to it. He is within it, at the heart of it, its interpreter and even in some respects its leader. He may mitigate the fierceness of the natural struggle, bring aid to the sick and wounded, provide opportunities for the gifted and the spirited, break down the invidious bars of birth or poverty, and set men free to express the best that is in them. A society in which wealth does not make poverty and those who are born poor are not deprived of the chance of a good and happy life is within his achievement, but he must remember that the process of which he is a part is greater than himself and moving to ends of which he can only dimly and with the eye of faith discern the meaning and purpose :

All experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

The idea that this "untravelled" world can be captured and imprisoned in any system imposed on it by any one generation is the illusion of men who think in terms of their own lives. Little as we may know of the world process, we are at least warranted in believing it to be infinitely greater and more mysterious than the mind of living man can conceive. "Thy thoughts are very deep. An unwise man doth not well consider this : and a fool doth not understand it."

4

It is idle to pretend that the possession of wealth is not an advantage, and the well-to-do risk a charge of cant when they preach the doctrine of "compensations" to their less favoured neighbours. Yet the constant strife about material things in which modern politics is involved undoubtedly tends to debase ideals and distort values. The poor have perpetually presented to them the picture of the idle rich as a subject of envy or a target of criticism, with the result that an inordinate quantity of thought and attention is directed to their doings. They are a small

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and unenviable minority standing outside the normal life of any class. To set against them is a large and honourable company of men and women who deliberately put behind them the idea of money-making as an object in life, and are content with any modest competence which enables them to follow a chosen calling. Among these are a host of professional men, doctors, lawyers, clergy, teachers, artists, writers, poets and others to whom all the wealth of the Indies would be no compensation for having to lead the life of the idle rich. The services to the State of these people are beyond price and none others have suffered more in the great upheaval of the last ten years. A more sympathetic understanding by the manual workers of their needs and their struggles should go far to assuage bitterness between classes. Not a few of them are earning less than skilled mechanics ; in many of their households, the payment of the baker and the butcher is as keen an anxiety as in any working-class home. The toil of brain is more exhausting, and the fatigue of it less easy to throw off than that of manual work. It is right that we should be reminded of the struggles of the young workman, but let the young workman also remember the anxieties, the disappointments, and even the privations which thousands of young men of this class suffer before they win even a modest footing in the professions.

Another defect of this debate is that its negative aspects swallow up its positive. Something might be gained if those who mould public opinion could more often seek to present the picture of the good life which is within reach of that vast majority of workers with hand or brain to whom a reasonable competence must be the limit of ambition. These represent the common lot with which the politician is mainly concerned. In the world of politics the humble and meek are seldom exalted when the mighty are put down from their seats and, even if we could suppose a perfect equality established, how to use it would still be the master-problem. This is commonly said to be a problem of education, to be solved by the setting-up of the right kinds of schools. That is indeed very important, but if the work

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of the schools is to be undone as soon as finished by a mean and impoverished idea of the art of living, the effort will be very largely wasted. We hear incessantly in these days of the necessity of making men and women efficient in wage-earning and money-spinning to the supreme end that they may, as the saying goes, get on in life. But what life is, how it may be enjoyed for its own sake, what pleasures of mind and body are within reach of the humblest of us, seems to enter hardly at all into the thoughts of the political theorists in their absorption with the framework of society. And the schools which teach the art of getting on in life do not teach the art of living.

And yet it is just here that the State can probably do more to redress inequality than in any other sphere. Every beautification of a city, every provision of public parks, playgrounds, and other amenities, every encouragement of noble art, fine drama and great music brings within reach of the multitude what otherwise are the privileges of the few; and in so far as modern States reach out in these directions they will be recovering the best of the lost ideals of antiquity. The grudging spirit in which most of them spare a few thousand pounds to the encouragement of the arts, and the blight which a Philistine officialism too often throws even upon these modest efforts, reflect seriously upon their claim to be civilized. The inventors of Socialist Utopias present us with pictures of life beautified and refined by the adoption of certain specifics which are plainly unrealizable in any time that we can foresee. But there is no necessary connexion between the two things. A considerable part of their dream is within the compass of any State, under any system, if it has the imagination and the courage to do boldly what it now does timidly and apologetically, and to conceive of itself as in some sense the exponent of the good life.

CHAPTER XXX

OPINION AND KNOWLEDGE

Two Views of Government—And a Third: Property and Social Justice—The Doctrine of Ransom—Expropriation, Just and Unjust—Economic Illiteracy and its Dangers—The Need of Knowledge—Public Policy and Wealth—The System of Priorities—The Need of a Census of Production—A Possible Use of Taxation—An Annual Report on the Nation.

I

TWO views about the nature of government are always in open or concealed conflict :

(i) the view that government is a convenience of individuals invented by them to do certain things they cannot do for themselves, i.e. guard their property, defend their country against foreign enemies, conduct postal services, dispose of sewage, etc.

(ii) the view that it is an organization of the common life with the duty thrown upon it of securing the well-being of all members of the community.

A third view which, though not commonly mentioned in text-books, has probably had more influence on the history of the world than either of these two is that government is a valuable prerogative of certain persons, kings, emperors or statesmen, whose business it is, like that of Machiavelli's Prince, to see that their own power and privileges are secure against challenge by either subjects or foreign states. It is meet, says a Turkish proverb, that the sultan should be rich, and his subjects poor. If we are truthfully to analyse the various tendencies which determine what government actually is, I am afraid we cannot exclude the last of these ideas in considering modern democratic states. The struggle to get and keep power, and the tendency of those who possess it to magnify their office and extend its sphere,

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are among the permanent human traits which perpetually defeat the effort to minimize the functions of government.

No existing Government corresponds to any theory, individualist or socialist, and in all probability none ever will. The services which even a strict individualist demands of his Government require a mechanism of common action which gradually spreads to spheres which are outside his theory; the State itself has a long history in which all the theories are inextricably mixed. Nowhere can it be said that the State is a neutral spectator of impartial conditions in which the race is to the swiftest and the prize to the strongest. Hereditary wealth and the vast and intricate system of law and custom which keeps guard over it are alone fatal to the equality of opportunity required by the individualist theory. The State is all the time in league with the family in its effort to hand on its property and give its members a favourable start in the world. That is in accord with human nature, as it has been since the beginning of things, but the result is that not only are men not born equal, but that they are born under all manner of privileges, disabilities, conditions of wealth, poverty and caste which are stamped upon society by the State and its law, and which make the equal race for an attainable goal impossible within the term of a man's life.

This is one of those truisms which are generally forgotten by the rich and remembered by the poor. The public man can never afford to forget it. Practically the whole question for him, if he is thinking of social justice, is what can be done to redress the artificial inequalities created by the institution of property. In practice the State discovers that it cannot defend property without making large concessions to the non-propertied. When he launched his doctrine of "Ransom" in 1884, Joseph Chamberlain was denounced as the Jack Cade of our time, but he merely revealed what is the *secret de Polichinelle* of an acquisitive society. The rich cannot be secure in their property unless they are prepared for a reasonable sacrifice to enable the poor to be contented. There may be infinite controversies about the meaning of the word "reasonable" but the prin-

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ciple must be accepted as much for the security of society by the Individualist as for its well-being by the Socialist. What is "right" for the Socialist is "prudent" for the Individualist.

I have suggested in previous chapters that controversies about property, which are likely to play a larger and larger part in our domestic politics, would be much simplified and mitigated if it were generally understood that the greater part of what is called property in modern times cannot be divided, though it may easily be destroyed. Economically speaking, the poor have nothing to gain by dispossessing the rich, and it is, to say the least, extremely doubtful whether a Communist state would do better for the average of its citizens than Capitalist states recently have done for their derelict members through the poor-law and unemployment insurance. But economics do not exhaust this argument. There is the plain fact constantly before the poor that a small number of privileged beings enjoy material pleasures that are denied to their fellow-citizens ; that this small number consumes wealth, sometimes in vulgar, foolish and licentious ways, which might be available for the relief of poverty ; and that it seems wholly unaware of the toil of brain and hand that goes to the making of the wealth so easily squandered. What threatens property is not so much the economic theories of Socialists or Communists as a natural revolt against its misuse, and an equally natural objection to the perpetual stressing by those who enjoy it of the difference between them and other people.

The politician who wishes to find safety in these controversies must constantly bear in mind that the property with which he is mainly concerned is not a thing but an institution which has to be justified by its social utility, or rather a network of institutions, many of which are highly artificial and may be insensibly modified by legislation, or acts of policy which have in appearance only the most distant connexion with them. To talk of absolute rights and wrongs is out of place in this sphere. In great emergencies such as a war of life and death for a country, the State claims all rights over the property as over the lives

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of its citizens, and it is improbable that any Government will again be involved in a great war without conscripting the wealth as well as the lives and services of its citizens. There will of course always be passionate controversies as to the emergencies which justify large drafts on the property of individuals, but a Government which was convinced that expropriation on a large scale was the only alternative to anarchy would be not only justified but compelled to resort to this expedient.

Given the emergency, honesty on the part of a Government consists in requiring equality of sacrifice on the part of all its citizens for an end conceived to be of public advantage. Most modern states have worked out this principle in schemes of graduated taxation, which presuppose that "equality of sacrifice" requires contributions to the State, not only in proportion to wealth but in an ascending scale as wealth increases—which is demonstrably the fact, if the meaning of the word "sacrifice" is borne in mind. It may of course be that a man who after meeting all the demands of the State still has an income left him, say of £50,000 a year, makes no sacrifice comparable to that of the man who contributes £50 out of an income of £500, or there may be special circumstances in which the former would make the greater sacrifice. Perfect equalization is necessarily beyond achievement. But in so far as the State aims at it, it is on safe ground, and no charge of confiscation can properly be laid against it.

But the same principle obviously works in the reverse way against all measures for expropriating the property of particular classes, without compensation, for a public end. If, for example, it is deemed to be of public advantage to nationalize land, railways, or mines, "equality of sacrifice" requires that the existing owners shall be paid a fair price for what they give up to the community. That is to say, the cost of the transaction must fall equally on the whole community which is supposed to benefit, and not on individuals who happen to be in possession of the desired property. A violation of this rule is properly called "confiscation," and if politicians would be careful to confine

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the use of that much-abused word to the cases or alleged cases in which this issue arises, they would avoid a great deal of unnecessary heat, and be on much safer ground in arguing the questions of policy and expediency that remain. These are of course innumerable. A bad and wasteful Government may be injuring all its citizens by taking money out of their pockets and spending it in worse ways than they would spend it for themselves, and there may be acute controversies about the merits of certain objects which require taxation or certain policies which require expropriation. But so long as the taxation is evenly distributed, and the price paid to the expropriated is a fair one, the charge of "confiscation" does not lie against the State.

2

But if these powers are conceded to the State in the abstract, it is immensely important that it should be well equipped to use them. That is impossible, unless politicians are informed of the facts and have a reasonable knowledge of the probable results of their own action. If large numbers of them are wholly unaware of the contribution which science is making to the questions that they are called upon to answer ; if they think political economy to be a pedantry of professors and the overwhelmingly important questions of currency and exchange to be a mystery beyond human fathoming, they are in no better case than surgeons without knowledge of anatomy or physiology. There are of course certain problems in which specialized knowledge is necessary, but politicians who have not some clear idea of what they mean when they talk about "wealth," who do not know what the process of international trade is, who confuse capital with income, credit with cash or transferable with non-transferable wealth, are a public danger. This ignorance may, as theologians say, be invincible and not wilful, but it is fatal to any orderly and prosperous economic society. The sensitive and intricate mechanism of the modern system of trade and credit cannot survive the experiments of economic illiterates, and the capitalist

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statesmen who indulge in them are as dangerous enemies of the existing order as professing Communists, indeed in most states much more dangerous, since their opportunities for destruction are far greater.

When Plato said that philosophers should be kings and kings philosophers, the world interpreted him as meaning that certain solemn and remote beings should sit apart and impose their will upon the ignorant multitude. We should probably be nearer to his real meaning, if we said that those who take upon themselves to govern a country must be reasonably equipped with knowledge of the subjects they profess to handle. Under democratic forms of government, we easily fall into the habit of thinking that everything must be decided by what is called public opinion. We can scarcely pick up a newspaper without reading that public opinion will "never stand" something which everyone knows must happen and ought to happen, or finding some question hotly debated to which competent opinion has long ago decided that there is only one answer. And similarly we find public men on platforms encouraging beliefs which everyone knows to be false and refusing to face facts which it is the beginning of wisdom to acknowledge. There are a hundred good reasons why government should not be conducted by those who are called "experts," but unless there is some undisputed body of doctrine on questions which are susceptible of clear proof and accurate knowledge, and unless these are railed off from party controversy, good government will be impossible. There will always remain an immense field of debate about the merits of rival policies and systems, but if we have no intelligent ideas about the nature of the systems we are arguing about, and what they are capable or incapable of performing, we shall pass from false premisses to disastrous conclusions. Heated debates about Capitalism and Socialism in which Capitalists appear not to understand what "Capitalism" is and Socialists are unable to define "Socialism," and both encourage expectations which are mechanically impossible are a dangerous absurdity. We have passed the time when ignorance on these subjects could be condoned as an

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amiable weakness of amateur politicians ; and hard experience is beginning to teach us that chaos and strife must follow from its continuance.

In all other spheres advancing science has steadily reclaimed larger and larger tracts of territory from the unknown, the mystical and the debatable. Events which former ages attributed to the miraculous interventions of saints, angels and demons have gradually been brought within the sphere of law and knowledge. The boundaries between science and religion have been delimited, and the ideas of intelligent causation extended. An immense number of scientific controversies are spent simply because the facts are known. Some analogous process there must be in public affairs, if democracy is to be made safe for the world. Europe in the last five years has insisted on an immense and most costly verification of the obvious ; and we may at least hope that its experience will be gathered up and funded for the use of future generations on all those questions which plainly are susceptible of scientific tests. Some authority such as an Economic General Staff for gathering up and formulating experience of this kind should be part of the regular machinery of government, and if it were detached, as it should be, from party controversy, it would supply a standard of undisputed knowledge which would be fatal to a vast deal of demagogic folly. In the meantime we must aim at creating a public opinion which will hold statesmen specially to account for sins against knowledge.

3

It is not my purpose here to advocate any particular policy, but reflection on the present phase of the eternal debate between wealth and poverty suggests one or two methods which the State may adopt to keep it within bounds. The economic harm done to a community from great accumulations of wealth lies not in the personal expenditure of its possessors, which is a comparatively small matter, but in the power which they may exercise of directing labour and energy into channels which are either useless or harm-

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ful. The more serious Socialists who demand that the State shall control industry do so not with the idea of redistributing wealth, but in the hope that State-controlled production would be more intelligent, more humane, better directed to providing in abundance the necessities of life and less to the provision of the tinsel and glitter that is often so profitable to the producer and so poor a thing to the purchaser. It is possible to entertain very serious doubts as to whether the State as controller of industry could effect this object, and yet to feel the fullest sympathy with it. Whatever may be its system of government or however impracticable we may think any other, a state will eventually come to grief if an inordinate amount of its energy is directed to providing either palaces for the rich or shows for the poor before it has provided the mass of men and women with the necessities of decent existence ; if it multiplies cinemas and is short of houses ; if it produces unlimited beer and spirits and cannot afford boots or meat. Eventually the problem of modern states is that which Plato attempted to solve for his Republic, the problem of a well-balanced distribution of its brains and labour to supply the needs of both body and soul. By whatever name they call themselves, and whatever system they favour, this still must be the aim of all Governments.

Under stress of war we developed the system of priorities, and instantly discovered its immense value. With submarines threatening starvation, we found that we could not afford the luxuries and embroideries of the life of peace, and wisely decided that labour and brains must be cut off from these and concentrated on the production of necessities. There is, I think, much reason to regret that the system of priorities was not prolonged, together with the necessary Government controls, to meet certain of the greater emergencies which followed the war. Who can doubt, for example, that if the housing question had been treated as a national emergency, comparable to the exigencies of the state of war, and dealt with in this way, it would have been solved in the five years following the war ? It is possible that in restoring the principle of the priorities,

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and giving it a place of honour among the functions of government, we shall find a working solution of some of the controversies between Socialism and Individualism which are now a beating of the air. That is to say, the State might be conceded a certain power of controlling the direction of industry, and yet leave the business of production to private enterprise.

If I may work out this suggestion a little further, the obvious method of control under such a system would be taxation. The State would relieve from taxation all necessary industries which were under-developed and throw the burden on unnecessary industries which were over-developed. But these words are vague, and in ordinary times the State is not sufficiently equipped with knowledge to give them meaning. When we are at war and our existence is threatened by an enemy seeking to starve us, we know instinctively which of our activities is essential and which is not. When we are at peace, we feel that we should be exposing ourselves to an arbitrary tyranny if we left Governments free to say what kind of production is necessary or desirable and what the reverse. And so we should if Governments decided such questions at their whim and pleasure or by the light of nature. But this would not be so if they were provided with an accurate and careful census of production showing year by year how the national energies were being directed, into what channels they were going, in what respects, according to a reasonable estimate of the needs of the population, production was deficient, and in what respects excessive or extravagant. On any hypothesis whatever of the functions of the State, accurate knowledge of this kind must be part of the essential equipment of Government, and the Labour Government did well, when it came into office, to take up at once the work of preparing a census of production which had been interrupted by the war. With this accurate knowledge exposed to public criticism and comment a Government would be in a position to handle taxation scientifically, to trace the results of its own action upon industry, and to direct its policy to the general end of well-balanced production.

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It may be objected that all these ideas presuppose some agreement as to the kind of production and the distribution of brains and labour which would be for the well-being of the nation. That is perfectly true, and it is also true that the general ideas on this subject, though vaguely benevolent, are very ill-defined and widely different. An agricultural labourer's idea of the good life is not at all the same as that of a city clerk, or an artist's as that of a commercial millionaire. The levelling down and flattening out of these human diversities is the last thing to be desired, even if it were possible, and it may even be said that the proper aim of all systems of government is to leave men free to live their own lives. By all means let this be one of the tests, but rightly understood it should not be a sedative, but a stimulus to active thought and research in regard to the means whereby this free life may be made possible to the mass of men and women. The State being the guardian of the institution of property cannot fulfil its trust if it is indifferent to the results of its own action, or is content to drift without knowledge into a position in which large numbers of its citizens consider themselves outside the pale of a privileged system and cut off from the conditions of free life. To have accurate knowledge of the economic facts, and to be aiming all the time at a division of labour which shall give priority to the necessities of life must be the line of safety for Governments as for citizens.

The development of society from the deeply-ingrained traditional system of working for private profit to a co-operative or Socialist method can only be a slow growth if it is to take place at all. Yet the possibility of something much more orderly and scientific than our present haphazard method of experiment ought not to be ruled out in the meantime. Suppose we had either the preparatory First Chamber which I suggested in a previous chapter or a really competent "Economic General Staff" raised as much above party as the Committee of Imperial Defence, and suppose that it had at its disposal, as one of its main sources of knowledge, a complete and trustworthy census of production; would not such a body at once reduce to

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indisputable fact a great many questions which are now the subject of useless and embittered debate, and would it not in so doing enormously simplify the questions which are put to the electors? I think of this body issuing an annual report, such as we have had from the Government of India, on the material and moral progress of the people of Great Britain, showing where its production was manifestly deficient, and where it appeared to be wasteful or extravagant, and so affording a solid foundation of fact for both the Government and its critics. Outwardly and in form this information would be material and economic, but its moral effect would necessarily be immense. Proof regularly offered by a competent authority that the nation was directing an inordinate part of its energies to ends that were futile or trivial, while a considerable number of its members were short of the necessities of life would in all probability have a far greater effect on the mass of people than the preaching of philanthropists or the ex-parte appeals of politicians. I can imagine nothing better calculated to encourage wise and humane views about property or to render acceptable the sacrifices which must be made if the inequalities of wealth are to be harmonized with the general well-being. But in any case some organization of this kind is becoming imperative if only to provide a boundary between knowledge and opinion, and to prevent the disastrous sins against knowledge that have been witnessed in recent times as well as the perpetual submission to a necessarily uninformed opinion of questions which ought not to be in debate. Democracy is perfectly competent to answer the kind of questions that ought to be submitted to it, but the politicians and public men who minister to it must know what these are, and be scrupulously on their guard against taking into the sphere of opinion what belongs to knowledge.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE THEORY OF REVOLUTION

The Doctrine of the Rights of Man—Its English Origin and French Development—Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau—The Social Contract—Looking Backwards and Forwards—The Power of Rousseau—Elasticity of his Doctrine—The Road to Bolshevism—An Alleged Mutual Covenant—Revolution and Dictatorship—Inadequacy of the Theory of Rights—The Supposed Act of Government—Political and Religious Fana-ticism—Revolutionary Experience and its Moral—The Surgery of Revolution—Some Practical Conclusions.

I

IF the relations of states with each other raise innumerable unsettled questions, no less must be said of the relations of men with their own governments. The indictment of rulers by subjects is of immemorial antiquity ; the cry of the poor has gone up in all ages. But for the greater part of the world's history rulers have more often been overthrown by one another than deposed by their subjects and, on the whole, they have maintained their theory that rebellion is a capital crime which no provocation can justify. When oppression has passed the limits of tolerance, rebellion has followed, but rather as a physical reaction from intolerable conditions than as the assertion of a right to break away from authority. Intricate relationships in which all parties were expected to keep to their own, and to respect each other's, boundaries characterized mediæval society, but outside these men were at the mercy of the superior powers. Barons threw off the yoke of kings ; merchants and craftsmen organized themselves into corporations and guilds and jealously guarded their privileges against all comers. In these ways strictly defined rights and liberties were won by groups of individuals who had the will and the power to strive for them.

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But it was not until comparatively recent times that the idea of men asserting rights as men obtained a footing in political theory, and then it rapidly developed an explosive power which is still unexhausted. If we are to understand modern politics, we must consider the course which this idea has run, and the perplexing consequences which have followed from the endeavour to give it meaning and expression in political institutions.

The beginnings were English, though the principal tendency soon became French. Hobbes with his theory of a "mutual covenant" between the multitude and its rulers, John Locke with his plea of popular rights in justification of the Revolution of 1688, provided Rousseau with the main ideas of his Social Contract. Both Hobbes and Locke proclaimed that not Kings and Governments, but the people as conceived in contractual relations with their rulers are the sources of power. The condition of government is, Locke insists, the "consent of the Society, over whom nobody can have a power to make laws, but by their own consent and by authority received by them." Rousseau embroidered the idea by assuming that a real or implied contract between the society and those to whom for its own convenience it deputed the business of leadership was the actual historical beginning of civilization, and to the abuse of their trust by those leaders he attributed all the depravities, corruptions and tyrannies which, though men are born free, have placed them everywhere in chains and deprived them of the heritage which a beneficent nature intended for them. Thus conceived, the rights of man are his birthright. Philosophically Rousseau found himself in conflict with countrymen of his own who believed in the illimitable possibilities of human progress and looked to the future as he looked to the past for the ideal which, as Plato more wisely says, is laid up in heaven. But this distinction, though philosophically interesting, had little bearing on the practical results of either theory. If Rousseau's ideal was in the past, it could be won back by the same steps as would lead the believers in a future state of perfection to their goal. Both schools of idealists were

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vague about the details of this state of perfection, but both looked to some condition widely different from the present and both appealed to men in general to throw off their chains and realize the thwarted possibilities of human nature.

It may be proved a hundred times over that Rousseau's doctrine was philosophically absurd and historically false, and that it ought, according to all the laws of just thinking, to have cancelled out against the views of progressive thinkers in his own time. But the fact remains that, clothed in his genius, it delivered a shattering blow to French feudalism and all the theories that associate government with the divine right of kings or the privileges of particular classes. To men oppressed by the artificialities and corruptions of eighteenth-century monarchy, the thought of a return to nature came as a breath of pure air, bringing healing and consolation. Whether they had been free was of no importance compared with the fact that they were now in chains which they had the power, if they had the will, to strike off. In this new white light that blazed about the thrones, government was suddenly seen as the interest of the whole people and not as the private concern of the few who claimed a monopoly of it. So far the doctrine was a powerful step towards liberalism and democracy. But it was infinitely elastic. It did as well for the fathers of the American Constitution as for the terrorists of the French Revolution; it might be linked up with philosophic Radicalism or with State Socialism, reduce government to the minimum of public convenience and safety, or sanction its development into the Socialist commonwealth, with the State ordering the life of all its members. It might even lead to the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

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The last of these developments is worth special consideration at the present moment. In an interesting and prescient passage of his book on Rousseau,¹ Lord

¹ Morley's "Rousseau," II, 152.

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Morley traces the influence of Hobbes on the French philosopher :

There are numerous differences between the philosopher of Geneva and his predecessor of Malmesbury. The one looked on men as good, the other looked on them as bad. The one described the state of nature as a state of peace, the other as a state of war. The one believed that laws and institutions had depraved man, and the other that they had improved him. But these differences did not prevent the action of Hobbes on Rousseau. It resulted in a curious fusion between the premisses and the temper of Hobbes and the conclusions of Locke. This fusion produced that popular absolutism of which the Social Contract was the theoretical expression, and Jacobin supremacy the practical manifestation. Rousseau borrowed from Hobbes the true conception of sovereignty, and from Locke the true conception of the ultimate seat and original of authority, and of the two together he made the great image of the sovereign people. Strike the crowned head from the monstrous figure which is the frontispiece of the Leviathan, and you have a frontispiece that will do excellently well for the Social Contract.

The "great Leviathan," therefore, may also in due time proceed from the Social Contract. Let us hear Hobbes himself :

By this authority, given him by every particular man in the Commonwealth, he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof he is enabled to form the wills of them all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad. And in him consisteth the essence of the Commonwealth ; which (to define it) is one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants one with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may use the strength and means of them all as he shall think expedient for their peace and common defence.¹

The "mutual covenant" thus makes the great multitude consent to be governed by a ruler who may hold them down by a terrorism supposed to be derived from their own authority. Rousseau does not go to this length, but he too believed that the "great multitude" in large states

¹ "Leviathan," Part II, ch. 17.

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were incapable of self-government and proposed that by "mutual covenant" they should place themselves in the hands of an aristocracy of the wisest and best. What should happen, however, if they failed to elect the wisest and best, he left an open question, which the revolutionaries who imbibed his doctrine everywhere answered by nominating themselves. After this it was but a short step from the original doctrine to the conclusion that the "men in chains" required resolute government by their emancipators until such time as they recovered the natural virtues of which their oppressors had robbed them. "The transition of an oppressed nation to democracy is like the effort by which nature rose from nothingness to existence. You must entirely refashion a people whom you wish to make free—destroy its prejudices, alter its habits, limit its necessities, root up its vices, purify its desires." So spoke one of the Revolutionary Committees¹ which issued decrees for the French people after the great upheaval. So also spoke Lenin and Trotsky a hundred and twenty-six years later.

Subsequent generations have been surprised when revolutions in the name of the people and for the vindication of their liberties have led to merciless dictatorships. But this follows logically from the intellectualist view of society. The same passionate vision which sees humanity in a golden age sees also the imperfections of the emancipated slave. He must therefore undergo a period of probation at the hands of his superiors and be thankful that his masters are Communists and not Tsars. These masters will "destroy his prejudices, alter his habits, limit his necessities, root up his vices and purify his desires," and if he resists, will send him to the gallows or shoot him at dawn with the same grim sense of duty with which Inquisitors have consigned heretics to the flames. This deadly fanaticism of the revolutionary doctrinaire equals all that can be ascribed to the mediæval priesthood and lacks the priest's excuse that he is seeking the spiritual welfare of those whom he consigned to another world. Beginning as an intellectual passion,

¹ April 20, 1794. Quoted by Morley, "Rousseau," II, 132-3.

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it is quickly reinforced by the practical necessity of maintaining its ground against the reaction it creates. Tyranny thus grows by what it feeds on, and the need of self-preservation extinguishes all scruples and finally kills the doctrine which the tyrant professes.

3

Rousseau and the French philosophers spun their doctrines in the air with little presentiment of their explosive force in the world of affairs. It may be said that they provided the dynamite needed to clear the ground of a corrupt society, but they contributed almost nothing to the construction of the new order. So volatile were the "principles of the Revolution" that it was almost as easy to appeal to them under Napoleon as under Robespierre, and so empty were they of practical wisdom that those who acted on them remain in history as examples of what to avoid. It may be argued, and I think truly, that the doctrine of the rights of man has on the whole raised the value of humanity. When men say that they have rights they usually mean that they are suffering wrongs, but it adds force and dignity to their remonstrance that they should appear as claimants and not merely as remonstrants. This gives a new status to the poor and humble, and by so doing powerfully reinforces the humanitarian tendencies. But the doctrine in itself tells us nothing of what men may claim as their rights, and the philosophers who launched it failed to fill the gap. Their ideas of government were a compound of literary fancies and historical reminiscences which have little more than a curious interest for these times. The truth is that the notion entertained by these thinkers that there is an "art of government" capable of being expressed in rules and formulas which are applicable to all times and circumstances is itself a fiction. There is no such art, and there is no ideal state which could be relied upon to endure for a generation in a living and changing world. Until men and women become automata, government will be an unending adventure which will prosper or the reverse, according as men are

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capable of learning from experience, and will courageously face the unceasing adjustments to changes of circumstance, thought and opinion, which are of the essence of statesmanship.

Political theory makes the same havoc in the brain in the age of reason as theological dogma in the ages of faith. In secular as in spiritual affairs, those who believe themselves to have discovered the secret of salvation pass quickly to the conviction that they have a mission and a duty to impose their creed upon the unbelieving, and to use all means to that end. To persecute for the greater glory of humanity becomes at this stage as grim a necessity as to persecute for the greater glory of the Church. It is the fate of Rousseau and his school to have kindled at the same time the most generous and the most destructive emotions. Tempered by the liberalism which includes among the rights of man the right to think in his own way and live his own life, his doctrine has been almost wholly beneficent; fashioned in the German way it leads to the Marxian class-war, and the actual extermination of unbelievers. The cautious and tolerant English temper has so far been immune to this fanaticism, and will, I believe, continue to be so; but all absolutist theories of politics have this seed in them, and no community will be safe from some manifestation of it, if its politicians think of society as raw material to be stamped with patterns of their own devising. To conceive it possible that they may be mistaken; to be content to serve their generation according to their lights; to remember that the future is hidden from them, and that they will perforce leave their work unfinished when they go hence, are elementary maxims which apply to politicians as to all other men. Nothing has more disturbed orderly progress in the world than the passion for finality with its attendant illusion that a given political or economic system will bring humanity to its goal. This may be an amiable optimism or a presumptuous vanity, but it is a puny thing to set against the endlessly unfolding process of human destiny.

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The present generation has cause to remember Burke's famous saying that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Not least is it necessary to be vigilant of those who claim to be emancipators. In a loose way we have come to think that all advanced politicians must necessarily be zealots for liberty, but there is no presumption less warranted by history and experience. The great revolutionaries are as masterful as the masters they overthrow; the very precariousness of their position compels them to be intolerant of the faintest whisper of difference or opposition. They cannot afford to admit a shade of doubt in the absolute rightness and sufficiency of their doctrine. The same temper infects those who profess revolutionary aims while disclaiming revolutionary methods. These too have all the zeal of the finalists and the absolutists, and hold their doctrine with a more than theological bitterness.

It is not my purpose here to defend any political doctrine, but those who have to face anew the old controversies about the structure of society will be wise to bear certain points in mind. Safety cannot be found in denying the grievances which large numbers of men and women have against any existing order. Yet the burden of proof must be on those who propose a particular remedy, and if experience is any guide, revolutionary remedies are far worse than the diseases they profess to cure. The punishment they inflict falls equally upon the just and the unjust, and when it is over no one knows what to do. Karl Marx may show his disciples, Lenin and Trotsky, how to lay the Tsardom in ruins, but he has nothing of the slightest value to tell them about the government of a twentieth-century industrial community. In all the literature of the subject from Rousseau to Sorel there is nothing that helps the revolutionary on the terrible morrow of his triumph.

This is the true moral of revolutionary experience. Every step onwards from the hour when a revolution has succeeded is a tragic improvisation by men who are without experience in the task they have undertaken. It is not the

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testimony of their enemies, it is the testimony of the Bolsheviks themselves, that they had either no plans or that their plans miscarried ; that bankruptcy and famine and widespread confusion ensued ; that human nature was not capable of the effort they expected from it; that desperate expedients, including a return to the forbidden system of trading for private profit, had to be resorted to, lest the country should perish.¹ Revolution in Russia has been written in the book of doom for a generation past, and remembering what went before we may even think mercifully of those who were its instruments, but it is beyond belief that men who know and confess frankly that these have been its consequences should wish other peoples to travel the same road. Of all the manifestations of the revolutionary spirit this, surely, is the strangest and the most inhuman.

The Apostle's warning that the wrath of man maketh not the righteousness of God is written large over the history of revolution ; and if the social reformer will make it his watchword, he may be saved from the dilemma, which is so distasteful to him, of seeming to justify the existing order, when he is compelled to do battle with the revolutionary. He is not called upon to deny that the wrath of man is well-justified, and he may freely admit that if punishment were the object, it would often be difficult to stay judgment or sentence. The more frequently he raises his voice in warning to the wealthy, the better ; but he is nevertheless bound to warn the poor that they cannot be helped, and will almost certainly be greatly injured by any policy which has for its object the striking down of the rich. In a modern society rich men may be ruined, but except to a quite trivial extent, they cannot be plundered, and between them they perform functions, the cessation of which must be altogether ruinous to the machinery of production and supply. Mr. Wheatley during the election in the autumn of 1924 spoke with a light heart of " taking up the drains " of the nation

¹ See on this subject " The Economic Conditions of Soviet Russia," by S. A. Prokopovitch, Professor of Economics in the University of Moscow. P. S. King & Son.

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in contradistinction to the use of disinfectant or other palliatives proposed by social reformers. The Minister of Health should have known that to take up any section of any drain, unless there is another section immediately ready to go in, would be a criminal act for a sanitary authority ; and no less can be said of the statesman who proposes to deal with the drains of the nation.

The last thing to be desired is that the economic nature of things should be represented as cut off from the moral nature of things. But they have different orders of morality, and there is great peril in confusing them. Social injustice cannot be remedied by making economic confusion ; rather in the long run it is made more unjust. The idea of economic circumstances being made conformable to human worth—of a man's possessions corresponding with his character—is a materialistic fancy which is discouraged by all the religions, and ridiculed by the saints. It is a rational object for a civilized society to provide conditions in which all its members are able to secure a decent competence and enough margin to enjoy the pleasures of life ; but, except in so far as they militate against this object, there is nothing to be gained by discouraging diversities of wealth and culture above this level. There is no necessary incompatibility between the two things, and there is so little connexion between them that no nation has yet succeeded in destroying its rich without inflicting the utmost suffering on its poor.

We may think that the nature of things ought to be different or wish that it were different, but it is possible that even in this respect " Everyman " is wiser than any man. Something might be said for applying the surgery of revolution to a decaying society, if the surgeon could keep his patient under an anæsthetic while the operation was being performed, and until the new way of life had been prepared for him. But since there is no anæsthetic, and the surgeon is very imperfectly acquainted with the anatomy of the patient, and the new way of life can only be discovered by long and painful experiment on his vile body, the operation must be considered beyond the competence

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of human surgery. It may kill and cannot cure, and at the best leaves the patient prostrate. Fervid and panic-stricken denunciations of the "Red peril" are likely to do little more than excite the passions they are intended to quench, but a cool and patient effort to show why revolutions fail and must fail is a necessary part of political education, and this should be founded on a study of the abundantly available facts.

5

But while we pursue this argument, let us remember that states will always be in danger of the rebellion which is a mere physical reaction against intolerable conditions, unless they find a working solution of their economic problems. On that point, let me briefly summarize what has gone before. The analysis of wealth in modern conditions leads to two conclusions of equal importance. The first is that there is almost no existing wealth which could be taken from the rich and given to the poor¹ in the sense that taking and giving are commonly understood; and the second is that there is hardly any that has value without the co-operation of the poor. If the first conclusion rules out spoliation as an object of policy for the poor, the second is a standing reminder to the rich that there are two parties to the contract which secures them their possessions. That contract requires incessant renewal, and a perpetual revaluation of the services of brain and hands which, working together, create the income that supports them both and gives capital its value. For both of them the problem is not the division of any existing or accumulated store of wealth, but the discovery of the best organization to enable them to produce more wealth.

The processes of production are so various, intricate and adventurous that the State is unlikely to succeed in imposing its organization on them or stamping the results with its own values. Production for profit, which is so

¹ I use the words "rich" and "poor" for convenience, but both of course are entirely relative.

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much assailed by Socialist thinkers, is after all the one guarantee we have that people will get the kinds of things they want, and not the kinds of things that other people think they ought to want. As a general rule no one makes profit unless he meets a public demand. But the productive process is in its essence a partnership, and it is the failure to realize this aspect of it which is in large measure responsible for the modern arraignment of Capital. The worker is not only discontented with his earnings ; he has the sense of being constantly at the mercy of invisible powers, who misdirect his energy, take him on and throw him out at their convenience, treat him as an automaton without will or mind of his own. His demand is for a status which will give him freedom, security and self-respect. It is also, one may say, the demand of vast numbers of middle-class people who, too, feel that they are not free, and suffer mortifications and anxieties that take the savour out of life. But the class consciousness of which so much is heard in these times is peculiarly the protest of the manual worker against industrial conditions which in his view have reduced him to a chattel or a Robot. This is entirely rational and human, and there is no permanence for any system that turns a deaf ear to it. In so far then as it rules out Socialism, Capital must be prepared with answers of its own to the questions which Socialism raises, and it must embody these answers not in pious opinions or generalities, but in its own practice within its workshops and factories.

I am dealing here only with the foundations of policy, but if it could be understood by the poor that there is nothing to be gained by despoiling the rich, and by the rich that their wealth would have no existence without the consent and co-operation of the poor, the prospect would at once be more hopeful. Self-government has proved to be the wise answer to rebellion in the sphere of politics, and it may yet, with the necessary differences, be the right answer to industrial revolt. In any case economic absolutism is no more likely to survive than political.

EPILOGUE

I

WHEN we are young we think of the world as a drama which will be completed in our lifetime. We shall see the curtain fall on a scene of questions answered, problems solved, happy reconciliations effected. As we go on in years our hopes dwindle to the completion of a first act, and then at length we seem to be shut into a whirling moment of the divine or human comedy, without clue to plot, climax or conclusion. What can we effect in our lifetime, what experience can we hope to gain in the forty years of the average working life, which will add to the sum of wisdom or entitle us to influence our fellow-beings ; how shall we even clear our own thoughts or take any step with confidence ?—these, I suppose, are questions which weigh on all serious men, especially those who handle public affairs, as they come within sight of the end.

It is necessary, says the Greek philosopher, that we, though mortal, should as far as possible live the life of the immortal,¹ and there is no class of men to whom this maxim more applies than those who lead the public life. They are taken out of the individual life into the general life, and must project their minds into a future not limited by their own existence. To be thus taken out of themselves is their happiest necessity, and beyond doubt one of the reasons which, in spite of their laborious and exacting mode of existence, tends to prolong their working life beyond that of their fellows. But they need correspondingly to have some vision of the future implying a theory of life which is more than the wavering thoughts of average men. If they can see neither progress, pattern nor rhythm in human affairs, and disbelieve in Providence and overruling design, they can only live for the hour and play on the credulity of

¹ ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν. Aristotle, "Ethics," x, 7.

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their fellow-men. A religious man who thinks the earthly life to be merely a probation for the next may take a pious pleasure in helping his fellow-sufferers through this vale of tears, and a sincerely conservative man who believes that all change must be for the worse may see his duty in defending the existing order, but all others must have some idea of the end in view and some belief, however vague and uncertain, that progress is a possibility.

The idea of progress is thus for most of us a necessary postulate of the public life. Is it a reasonable idea? Has it any foundation except in the sanguine illusions of the human mind? High authorities may be found to say "no" to both these questions, and a learned historian¹ has recently written a book in which he hunts for traces of the idea through ancient and modern literature, and looks in vain until he strikes some almost forgotten writers of the eighteenth century—Bodin, Le Roy, Fontenelle, the Abbé de St. Pierre, etc.—and so comes to the conclusion that it is mainly a heritage from the Encyclopædists and other literary leaders of the French Revolution, who handed it on to the English Utilitarians. This, if one may say so with respect for so high an authority, is a dusty treatment of a great theme. The word is of little consequence, so long as we can discover the idea or even the germ of it, and I think it is true to say that this is deeply embedded in all stages of human thought. At some moments in history men seem to have looked back on an ideal state, and at other moments to have looked forward to some unattained or unattainable goal; but there is almost no moment when the great societies did not compare themselves with some ideal outside themselves, something to which they could attain or from which they might fall away, but which in either case served as a lamp to their feet, like the explicit modern idea of progress. The Jew thinks of the coming of the Messiah, the Greek of the ideal Republic, the Roman of the reign of Saturn, the Christian of the *Civitas Dei* and the Holy Roman Empire, each in his own way seeking the "pattern laid up in heaven" to which an imperfect humanity can only aspire.

¹ "The Idea of Progress," by Prof. J. B. Bury.

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Ideals are timeless, and so long as a community steadily keeps before itself the vision of a more perfect State, it matters little whether it conceives it as something to be attained in the future or something from which it has fallen away and may, with effort, recover. In either case there is the same dynamic element that we find in the modern idea of progress.

But a modern may go farther than this and boldly claim that a belief in progress as a process in time is the natural and reasonable inference from the history of mankind, so far as he knows it. Astronomers, I believe, are of opinion that this planet has many millions of years of habitable life in front of it, and the history of civilization is at the utmost about eight thousand years. The stages by which man struggled upward from the animal plane or passed from those cave-dwellings in which he has left the vivid traces of his artistry to the ordered life of the city or village are hidden from us, but we may say confidently that ten thousand years ago all humanity was in the Stone Age, living at the best the life of the Bedouin, and at the worst that of the Central African tribesman. If it is not admitted that modern life with all its imperfections is in some intelligible sense better than the life of cave-men, there is of course no basis for argument, but I imagine that the gloomiest of weeping philosophers would scarcely withhold this admission, or desire, if he could be born again, to re-enter life as an African savage.

A more arguable question arises when we take certain selected periods of history, and ask whether these are better or worse than our own times. I can imagine a man saying that he would rather have lived in Athens in the fifth century B.C., in Rome in the age of the Antonines, in Spain with the Moors, in Florence in the fifteenth century, or in Elizabethan England than in these days. But those who speak thus generally imagine themselves living the life of the favoured few in safe shelter from the perils and inconveniences of ancient and mediæval times. It might have been delightful to live like Apollinaris Sidonius in a sumptuous and beautiful villa in Gaul in the fifth century, pro-

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vided always that the Goths and Visigoths did not come your way. But it would need a very hardy historian to recommend the common life of the plain citizen, let alone the life of the great mass of the poor and unprivileged, in any of these periods, to the most ill-paid workman of modern times. It is of this average life that we must think and, lamentable as may be the poverty and inequality of the modern life, it is at least redeemed by an acknowledgment of the rights of men in the mass and a consciousness of the evils which beset them, for which we may look in vain in any ancient society, and seldom find even in the Christian mediæval societies. Whoever is in despair about progress may, I think, be advised to go back to ancient literature and read it with an eye to the moral ideas that are implied in it. He will find the most respected writers of antiquity tolerating slavery, thinking of the mass of mankind (*faex Romuli*) in a manner which seems to us outrageous and inhuman, accepting ideas of punishment which are a cruel savagery : and he will find religion to have been in large part a superstition which enslaved the mind and shut it off from wise and benignant ideas of human destiny.

But it is manifestly no uniform and continuous process which has carried mankind on. Its record, as has been often said, more resembles the temperature chart of a fever patient than a steady movement from strength to strength. With the Great War still fresh in our minds, we cannot gainsay its tendency to relapse into barbarism and even to plunge the deeper down in proportion as it has painfully climbed up. A man who was born in the year when Queen Victoria came to the throne and passed from the scene in 1913, might reasonably have formed an entirely different estimate of human progress from one who was born ten years later and survived to the year 1924. And necessarily with the shadow of these events still over us, the question must occur whether some things that we have counted progress, and in which we have specially taken pride, may not be our undoing, if we are unable to control them. The vision of science outstripping morality and reinforcing the latent savagery of the civilized with a power of destruc-

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tion unknown to savages is, it must be admitted, the most appalling that presents itself to the modern mind.

2

Here the pessimist may find his opportunity. I can imagine him painting a picture of new and stupendous problems awaiting the modern world, impelling it on courses to which past history affords no analogy; the picture of a crowded and confused world with unappeasable racial and national antagonisms ruthlessly pursued with destructive weapons of increasing range and power; of European man compelled by his internecine conflicts to relax his hold on Asia and Africa, and presently brought face to face with new and formidable movements of brown and yellow men demanding the desirable places of the earth for their overflowing populations.

Or, as some "eugenists" appear to do, he may construct a theory which draws a circle of doom round the more gifted and refined members of the human race. The proletariat breeds unheedingly, for ever multiplying the worst types; the cultivated minority limit their families, and are sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. The first listen not at all, and the second listen only too readily, when birth-control is preached; so inevitably we are threatened with an inordinate multiplication of the lower and the gradual extinction of the higher types. The very process which leads men and women to seek a more civilized life puts them on the road to self-extinction. The "good life" defeats itself, and those who attain to it must be a small and dwindling minority.

The argument seems complete, and the only answer is that it does not happen. There is no reason to suppose that the purpose of nature would be served by the multiplication of the type which the "eugenist" seems to have in mind—that of a cultivated upper-middle class with serious intellectual pursuits—or even that the general happiness would be promoted by it. Granted that they are the salt of the earth, it is not good to have too much salt. There is

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no sign that this class is failing; it is always being recruited from the classes below it, and where it is not being recruited, the failure is not to be attributed to nature but to a social order which raises barriers between classes. In new countries where conditions are equal, the "proletariat" seems to supply the necessary proportion of energetic, resourceful, and even intellectual characters, and even in the old countries it responds quickly to efforts to improve its physical surroundings. The idea of any general physical deterioration seems to be unsupported by any trustworthy evidence; the death-rate has rapidly declined in recent years, disease is less frequent; it is hardly possible to doubt that the physique of the mass of people has considerably improved in the last fifty years, and there is certainly no reason to think that the level of intelligence has declined. Infinitely more may, no doubt, be achieved, but the idea that some self-stultifying process of nature is constantly at work thwarting the efforts of statesmen seems to be a gratuitous counsel of despair. Nature may not produce the type laid down for her by her instructors, but it is at least possible that she knows better.

In the years before the war we listened to incessant lamentations about the decay of the town-bred populations. They were said to be dwarfish in stature, feeble in physique, frivolous in mind and inordinately given over to pursuits which sapped their manhood and rendered them unworthy to belong to an imperial race. Then the war came and they went in their millions to the trenches and there displayed courage, manliness and endurance surpassing all that had been recorded of the fighting races, and to these martial virtues added such cheerfulness, good-humour and mutual helpfulness as won the hearts of all who led them. The clerk, the counter-jumper, the van-boy, the docker seemed in league to confuse their critics and all others who dogmatize rashly about human worth. This memory may fade, but it remains vivid in the minds of those who had only a glimpse of what these people did and endured, and causes a certain impatience at the presumption which thinks it can breed a better type.

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3

From the beginning of the nineteenth century the fear of population outrunning subsistence and making life perpetually more perilous and difficult in the consequent struggle for food has been an obsession of certain minds, and we have seen it alternating with the contrary panic when population has shown the slightest sign of declining. Birth-control and birth stimulation seem perpetually to dog each other as remedies for these alternate panics, and in Europe to-day we see inducements offered for the increase of families in one country, while the preachers of prudence are actively at work advising their limitation in the next. At the root of the European trouble is the hard fact that France with a stationary or declining population maintains claims against her more populous neighbours, which in the long run can only be made good, if she is able to disarm them or to counterbalance their numbers with superior weapons or alliances with other nations. But France is not alone in this. In Germany also the fear of the vast population of Russia and the vision of it descending in an avalanche from the East were powerful contributory causes of the great war.

Here again the pessimist has his opportunity, and if he extends his vision and looks across the world, he will see the same problem complicated by racial passions which seem wholly unamenable to reason or charity. Education and religion stand helpless before the problem of brown, black and white ; fraternity and equality come to a sudden stop at the colour line. The Asiatic and the European cannot live apart and will not live together ; the British planter digs in his heels and says he will not have the Indian immigrant, though thereby he reduces the theory of equal British citizenship to confusion ; the Californian says he will not have the Japanese, though thereby he brings ruin on the " Pact of the Pacific." All over the Pacific the white man stands on guard for vast territories which he bars against the yellow man, but cannot fill with his own race. In the meantime the problem of keeping the East subdued to a

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benevolent Western rule becomes more and more difficult, and the education which we had hoped might reconcile East and West fills the East with increasing impatience to throw off an alien Western rule.

So we may pile up the tale of problems, defying reason, bewildering the human brain, making of statesmanship an idle and helpless gesture before incontrollable forces of instinct and passion. To be compelled to contemplate these problems is a wholesome corrective of intellectual arrogance, but it is a still greater arrogance to suppose that because we are unable to solve them they have no solution. We may frankly confess that the known past is too brief, and our experience too narrow to enable us to answer these riddles, and yet hold it to be a reasonable belief that the power which has brought man from the jungle and the cave will enable him at length to enjoy the fruits of the earth in peace and substitute brotherliness and friendship for conflict and slaughter. In no other way can we conceive the impulse to civilization which distinguishes man from the brutes or explain the quality which all the world agrees in calling humanity.

Here also, as it seems to me, the positive signs which permit hope come to reinforce faith. The whole population of the globe could still find comfortable standing-room on the Isle of Wight, and science is incessantly at work increasing the productivity of the soil and devising new means of transport. A scientific traveller told the British Association in 1924 that the Congo Basin and the Amazon Valley could between them, if they were fully developed, grow as much wheat as is grown in all the rest of the world put together ; and experiments like those made by the American Government in the Panama Canal zone suggest that the tropical plagues and pests may be so overcome as to enable Europeans at least to work if not to live in these regions. It is no great stretch of imagination to suppose aerial transport developed in such a way as to enable the workers in tropical regions to have frequent opportunities of recuperating in the temperate zones. Prophecy is rash, but never did the prospect of tapping new resources and making

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them available to all the world look more promising than to-day or the nightmare of men exterminating each other in a struggle for a dwindling quantity of food seem more gratuitous. Against the vision of a malignant science preparing man's destruction we may set that of a beneficent science solving problems that now appal us and enormously expanding the power of man over nature.

4

And yet at the end of it all we must admit that except with the eye of faith we have no measure either of life or of death. If life were acknowledged to be the greatest of all boons and death the greatest of all evils, the problem of government would be enormously simplified. The fact that this manifestly is not the belief of mankind, that vast numbers will cheerfully sacrifice life for love, honour, loyalty, patriotism, and some, it must be added, for hate, lust and greed, is the finest, and to the statesman, the most baffling quality of humanity. A world which was resolutely determined to prolong life to the utmost and to avoid death at all costs would present few problems to Governments or magistrates. The soldier would lay down his arms, the criminal not risk his neck, the adventurous stay at home, the rebel and revolutionary become a meek citizen. Such a world, one feels instinctively, would itself be dead. But it is just this contempt for death which baffles the peace-makers and brings confusion to the politics which assume that hard reason and self-interest will prevail. The pacifist himself is seen dying for his creed in his prison cell, and the Quaker stumps the country to champion armies which are fighting and dying rather than accept the institution of slavery. Statesmen can only work on the hypothesis that life has supreme value, yet they are dealing all the time with multitudes who will resist to the death a thousand things of which there is no common measure, and will give their lives without a thought for a flag or a boundary or a scruple of honour.

There is no purely materialist measurement of these

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forces. It is a crime to play on them; it is folly not to recognize them. The statesman must have a sense of values beyond his values, of a spiritual world perpetually invading his world and bringing confusion to the politics of reason and self-interest. He must also be aware of an underworld of instinctive animal passion easily unchained and often giving itself the air of a noble emotion. The being who is only a little lower than the angels is also only a little higher than the brutes, and there is a dangerous meeting-place between the two extremes. Whoever works on this human material without thought for its latent destructiveness is engaged on the most dangerous of trades, and whoever is blind to its splendid possibilities will find that his labour is vain and his achievement paltry.

The German biologist, Haeckel, said that if he was permitted to ask one question of the Powers that be and obtain an answer to it, that question would be, "Is the Universe friendly?" The answer of Christianity is that God is love, and even if they are unable to rise to this, those who aspire to be called statesmen are required to believe that the world process has behind it a benevolent design that can be promoted by human effort. Thus conceived, the idea of progress is no sudden literary notion of modern times. In innumerable forms it has existed in the human heart since the beginning of recorded things. It is within us and in front of us and on the remote horizon; it is almost, we may say, the shadow of God in the world. It is and must be an act of faith. The future is hidden from our eyes. We cannot say that it will be as the past; we cannot say that the whole human scene will not be blotted out by some celestial catastrophe; we know not the limits of our conscious existence or whether we shall pass this way again. But our life becomes meaningless and our efforts vain unless we can as far as possible live the life of immortals and think of ourselves as actively co-operating in a scheme which is somehow good.

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